OCTOBER 2021

CHOICE

USE YOUR NOODLE

Reducing food waste at home

Sugar crash

Too-sweet toddler snacks

205 *products* TESTED

- Budget air fryers
- Cheddar cheese
- Laundry detergents
- Budgeting apps
- Food boxes & meal services
- Washer dryers
- Cling wrap
- Toasters

THE FOOD ISSUE

Plant power

The hunger for meat alternatives

Plus Food expiry dates, how to clean your cookware & more

VISIT…

Hungry for the truth

Shoppers want honest food labelling

A few months ago I celebrated my ninth anniversary with CHOICE. Given how many problems we come across in our day-to-day work, you'd think that by now I might have become a hardened cynic.

For better or for worse, that's not the case. Because for all of the rip-offs and unsafe products that we find, we also find plenty of great ones. There are lots of people out there genuinely trying to come up with new ways of making our lives better. Some businesses even seek our advice about how to improve their products.

That just makes me more disappointed when we come across others who are making products that appear to be deliberately designed to trick people.

There's probably no industry where we see this more than in packaged food, as the article on toddler's snacks in this issue illustrates.

While it's easy to acknowledge that the best snack for a toddler is something fresh like a piece of fruit or vegetables, that's not always practical. I no longer have toddlers in the family but I clearly remember the feeling of relief upon finding a long-life snack at the bottom of the bag when I was out somewhere and one of our kids was about to lose it.

While lots of parents appreciate the convenience of a packaged snack at times like this, most also really want to do the right thing. And the makers of toddler snacks have an answer!

Using words like 'ideal', 'nourishing' and 'vital', and packages brimming with images of fresh fruit and vegetables, their snacks promise to be the answer to every parent's dilemma. Sadly of course they aren't, with most of them using processed fruit as a way of loading up snacks with sugar.

This is just one example of the problems we find across the food market, with too many manufacturers selling products that promise to be healthy but are high in fat, sugar, salt, or all of the above. The Health Star Rating scheme has made it easier to compare some products but it's voluntary, meaning that food businesses can decide to omit star ratings from products that wouldn't score well.

While all of this is frustrating, it doesn't leave me immobilised by cynicism. If anything it gives me hope. When we publish articles on kids' food online, they are some of our most popular. Parents are hungry for the truth, and are fast to dump brands that they think have betrayed them.

Ultimately, that's a force that can't be denied, so I hope more businesses will come to see the opportunity in making products that honestly give their customers what they need.

Alan Kirkland, CEO
Email: alan@choice.com.au
Twitter: @AlanKirkland

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. Wherever possible, we pay full price for the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by membership. Memberships include online access and services such as CHOICE Help. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

BECOME A MEMBER To review the full range of membership options and benefits go to **choice.com.au/signup**.

MEMBERSHIPS/RENEWALS Call 1800 069 552 or email us at **ausconsumer@choice.com.au**.

PEFC 100% PEFC Certified This product is from sustainably managed forests and controlled sources Recognised in Australia through the Australian Forestry Standard www.pefc.org.au

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CHOICE magazine provides a selection of our top product reviews. We can't always include all the models we've tested, but you'll always find the products that scored the best. To view complete results for all our tests, go to **choice.com.au**, or call Customer Service on **1800 069 552** to add full online access to your membership package.

CHECKOUT

The latest consumer news in brief

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Customer compensation from six Aussie banks hits $1.86bn

As of 30 June 2021, the compensation tally for victims of fees for no service and dodgy financial advice had reached a whopping $1.86 billion.

The payouts have been coming from six of Australia's largest banking and financial services institutions – AMP, ANZ, CBA, Macquarie, NAB and Westpac – whose many misdeeds were aired at the banking royal commission and detailed in its scathing 2019 final report.

As of early August, NAB had compensated or offered to compensate 677,531 customers for fees charged where no services were delivered, and will have paid out $556,144,345 in total when the process is finished.

In the case of AMP, 225,513 customers are due compensation for the same institutional misconduct, with a total of $230,418,976 eventually making its way back to customers. Westpac owes $578,441,530 to 71,498 of its customers for having them pay for nothing.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Baby cot recalled after failing CHOICE safety tests

A portable cot for babies was recalled in late August after CHOICE laboratory tests revealed serious safety failures.

We contacted the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) about the issue – and we urge parents to return the product to the retailer for a refund.

The product in question, the Mamakiddies Baby Playard Happy Dino portable cot, failed the mandatory and voluntary safety standards in our labs and "presents a long list of risks including fall, suffocation, entrapment and strangulation", according to CHOICE tester and expert Kim Gilmour.

The cot was sold through retailer MyMoonMart. It declined our request on 12 July to issue a recall to its customers, but subsequently told CHOICE it was no longer selling the Mamakiddies cot. On 25 August, the product was finally recalled following our consultation with the regulator.

The Mamakiddies cot also failed several voluntary standards for babies' and children's products during our tests – standards we apply rigorously in our tests, and which we believe should be mandatory.

Six other cots and two strollers failed our most recent tests against the voluntary standard:

- 4Baby Liteway Travel Cot (Baby Bunting)
- Star Kidz Amico Super Light Travel Cot
- Kmart Anko Travel Portacot
- Babyhood Uno 2 in 1 Portacot
- Childcare Ison 3 in 1 Travel Cot
- Mocka Porta Cot
- Babybee Rover 2019 stroller
- Milly & Coup Milo stroller.

"Our main issue with the other portable cots we put through the CHOICE labs was a lack of mattress firmness, which presents a suffocation risk to children," says Gilmour.

"If you have any of the portable cots or strollers on this list, CHOICE urgently recommends you stop using them for the safety of your children."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

IMAGES: GETTY

Bank of Queensland: Our negligence is your fault

In a recent case launched by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) in the Federal Court, the Bank of Queensland (BoQ) was found to have several unfair terms in its standard-form loan contracts for small businesses going back to November 2016.

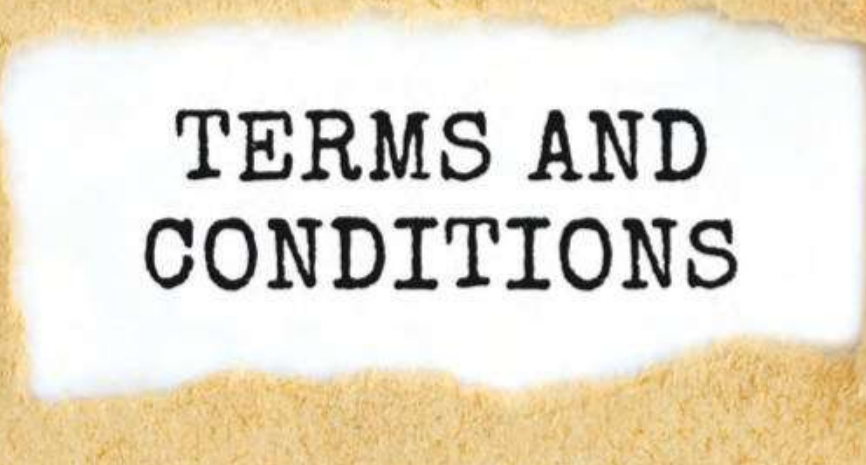
They included clauses that permitted the bank to vary the terms and conditions of the contract without giving borrowers advance notice – a practice known as 'unilateral variation' – and without letting borrowers get out of the contract without paying a penalty.

Worse, the BoQ contracts had indemnification clauses that let BoQ make a claim against customers for losses caused by BoQ's mistake, error or negligence.

"Small business owners deserve to be able to enter into fair loan contracts, especially where they have little or no ability to negotiate the terms," says ASIC commissioner Sean Hughes, adding "ASIC will take action against unfair practices in standard form contracts, whether it be for consumers or the small business community".

In early September, ASIC took further legal action to render the terms void and unenforceable.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Origin Energy in dock over changes to hardship plan

The Australian Energy Regulator (AER) has begun proceedings in the Federal Court against Origin Energy over its dealings with customers experiencing financial hardship.

The energy provider allegedly breached its own hardship policies by making "unilateral" changes to customers' hardship plans, cancelling some plans and failing to consider customers' actual ability to repay the plans. The alleged breaches happened to 18 customers and in some cases led to wrongful disconnections of residential energy accounts.

Various state energy ombudsmen received complaints about Origin's treatment of customers in financial hardship, and brought them to the attention of the regulator.

"We are very concerned about the alleged conduct by Origin, particularly the use of automation to make changes to hardship customers' payment plans without first seeking their agreement," AER chair Clare Savage says.

"We consider that the energy law and rules require retailers to offer individualised assistance to these vulnerable customers, not an automatically generated outcome."

JARNI BLAKKARLY

COVID-19 and Medicare: Shot in the arm for mental health

As well as causing respiratory and other physical health problems, COVID-19 can also affect mental health. Extended lockdowns, self-isolation or loss of employment can cause or worsen mental health issues, such as anxiety or depression.

If you or a loved one are experiencing mental health issues, it's a good idea to visit your GP who can assess and diagnose conditions, and make a mental health treatment plan with you. The plan will include treatment options and goals, and will be kept private between you and your GP.

Through the plan, you can also access Medicare-subsidised visits to a mental health professional. The number of sessions eligible for Medicare have risen from up to 10 to up to 20 per calendar year. The 10 extra sessions will be available until 30 June 2022.

These sessions can include appointments with a psychiatrist, psychologist, counsellor, social worker or occupational therapist. Appointments can be face-to-face or via video, phone or online.

Depending on the practitioner you visit, you'll be bulk-billed or get a rebate towards the cost. Many extras health insurance policies also include benefits for counselling services.

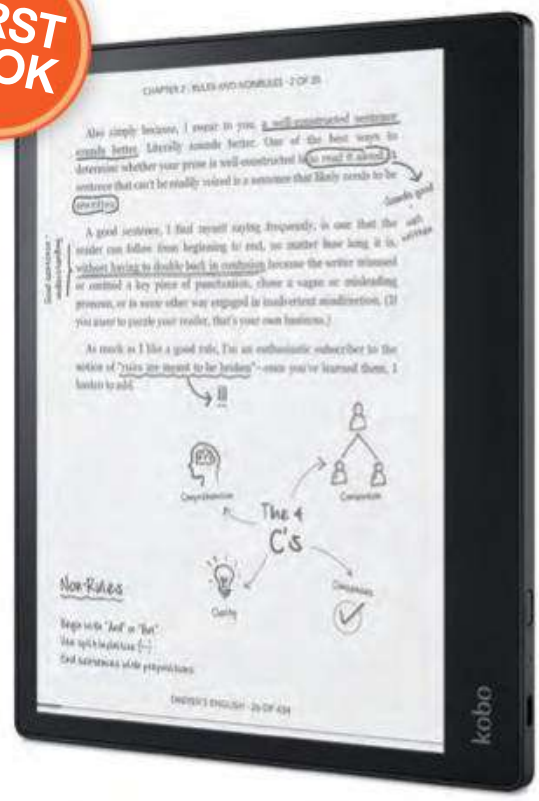
To find a practitioner, go to beyondblue.org.au. If you're in need of immediate support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.

UTA MIHM

IMAGES: GETTY

Kobo Elipsa

FIRST LOOK



The Kobo Elipsa is a versatile e-ink e-reader with a tablet-sized 10.2-inch (26cm) display. It's surprisingly comfortable to hold – once you remove the largely pointless 'sleep cover' that's included in the package, which just adds unnecessary bulk.

You can view the display in landscape or portrait mode, or easily lock the display in either orientation. A large bezel on one side of the device lets you use it left- or right-handed.

At 383g, the Elipsa is lighter than a tablet device, but heavier than most e-readers with six-inch displays, which tend to weigh less than 200g.

The Elipsa stylus, also included in the package, gives you the ability to draw on a graph, lines or bullet journal background, or on a blank page. You can save mark-ups and notes to the e-reader and then export them, but its potential as a collaboration tool is limited. Think of it more as a large e-reader that lets you share finished documents rather than allowing collaboration on works in progress.

If you love reading e-books but feel the latest e-readers with six-inch displays are too small, and you like to jot down notes on your e-books and PDFs, the Kobo Elipsa is well worth considering.

DENIS GALLAGHER

KOBO ELIPSA
Price: $599 (includes stylus and sleep cover)
Contact: au.kobobooks.com/products/kobo-elipsa

Not so fast: Telcos slammed over NBN speed claims

The ACCC has begun separate legal proceedings against Telstra, Optus and TPG over allegedly misleading claims about some of their NBN plans.

The regulator will argue that the companies wrongfully took payments from customers for some NBN plans whose promised internet speeds were never reached, and that this failure breaches Australian Consumer Law.

"Telstra, Optus and TPG each promised to tell consumers within a specific or reasonable timeframe if the speed they were paying for could not be reached on their connection," ACCC chair Rod Sims says. "They also promised to offer them a cheaper plan with a refund if that was the case.

"Instead, we allege, they failed to do these things, and as a result many consumers paid more for their NBN plans than they needed to. Collectively, hundreds of thousands of consumers were allegedly misled by these three big internet providers, Telstra, Optus and TPG, which accepted payments for NBN speeds they could not provide."

Sims says it's concerning that the companies were well aware of the issues, having earlier told the ACCC that they would offer remedies to affected customers.

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Decathlon fined $1.5m for dodging safety standards

Between January 2016 and December 2019, the sporting goods retailer Decathlon sold 432 basketball rings and backboards and 307 portable swimming pools that didn't comply with mandatory Australian safety standards.

Whatever revenue the retailer got from the sales might have been dwarfed by a recent $1.5 million fine in the Federal Court in a case brought by the ACCC. Many of the product models didn't include the safety labelling, consumer warnings or instructions for installation and use that the safety standards require.

Among the offending products were 66 portable pools more than 30cm deep that didn't have warnings such as 'Children have drowned in portable swimming pools', 'Ensure active adult supervision at all times' and 'Pool fencing laws apply to this pool'.

"It is illegal to sell products in Australia that do not comply with mandatory safety standards, and consumers have a right to expect that products they purchase will not endanger their safety, or the safety of their family and others," says ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

CHOICE still fighting for product safety standards

At CHOICE, we've long advocated for safe products for Australians. We believe the onus should be on manufacturers, suppliers and retailers to make sure the products they make and sell on the Australian market are safe.

Yet, as things stand, the Australian Consumer Law lacks any such requirement, known as a 'General Safety Provision'.

Because of this gap, Australian regulators are often forced to take a piecemeal approach to product safety, identifying and acting on specific categories of product after they realise it poses a risk of injury.

August was a busy month in product safety, with the ACCC releasing two issues papers: one on inclined infant products and the other on toppling furniture. These are both welcome and important initiatives.

Drawing on the expertise in our reviews and testing team, we lodged a submission to the ACCC on each issue, reiterating the need for an overarching General Safety Provision. We also made recommendations that we hope will result in more stringent regulation of these specific products, which continue to pose a risk of injury in Australian homes.

ALISON ELLIOTT

Disability insurance in super still not good enough, says ASIC

About nine million Australians pay for total and permanent disability (TPD) insurance, the vast majority through their superannuation funds. It generally pays out a lump-sum benefit if the insured person is injured or ill and is unable to work again.

But many insurers have long had very restrictive TPD definitions and onerous claims-handling practices – as identified by ASIC in a 2019 report, *Holes in the Safety Net: a Review of TPD Insurance Claims*.

In a recent follow-up to the report, the regulator says the industry has made some improvements, but not enough.

"Important areas for improvement remain, such as better ways to store and use data," says ASIC deputy chair Karen Chester. "We found that data captured by insurers is often inconsistent or not in a searchable or reportable format, limiting its usefulness.

"To achieve good customer outcomes, insurers must lift their data capabilities. Insurers also need to invest more in their data systems to target claims handling problems, and design products to meet the needs of their target market."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

IMAGES: GETTY

Online scammers exploiting legitimate Facebook competitions

Consumer Protection in WA is warning people who enter competitions on Facebook to be wary, after several scammers impersonating legitimate companies stole credit card details and other personal information.

The scammers targeted people who had entered legitimate Facebook competitions, sending them messages that appeared to be from the company, telling them they'd won and needed to hand over personal and financial details to claim their prize. Competitions targeted in recent months were mostly run by tourism and hospitality businesses.

Commissioner for Consumer Protection Gary Newcombe says businesses already suffering from the effects of COVID-19 lockdowns are trying to boost business through promotions, and that scammers are disrupting their legitimate operations.

"It's a common marketing method to increase the followers of a Facebook page by running competitions offering prizes of free accommodation, meals and liquor," Newcombe says.

"Our warning is for people who receive these 'congratulations, you're a winner' messages to be very suspicious... Send a message via the original page or call them if in doubt before being led to a fake website and giving away vital personal information that could be used to steal your identity or money."

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Draft laws to hold banking executives to account

In July 2021, the federal government released draft laws that will hold senior financial executives to account for any misconduct that happens under their watch.

These laws were a recommendation from the banking royal commission, which found widespread instances of senior executives being rewarded with bonuses while misconduct took place.

CHOICE drafted a submission to the government, calling for the proposed laws to be bolstered.

In 2020, the government outlined plans to impose $1 million penalties on senior executives in the event of misconduct under their watch. But the government has now proposed scrapping these penalties.

"Victims of financial scandals and banking misconduct deserve better," says CHOICE CEO Alan Kirkland. "We know from past experience that times of economic crisis provide fertile ground for scams and misconduct. We need strong executive accountability and a compensation scheme for victims now, and we need both measures to be broad-based and effective."

At CHOICE, we'll be campaigning to make sure that the laws are strengthened in the Senate, including having the $1 million penalties reinstated, so senior executives are held to account for misconduct. To join our campaign, go to **choice.com.au/strongerbankingprotections**.

PATRICK VEYRET

Australians lose $70m as investment scams soar

Australians have lost more than $70 million to investment scams in the first half of 2021 alone – more than the total losses to all types of scams reported in 2020. And those are just the cases reported to Scamwatch.

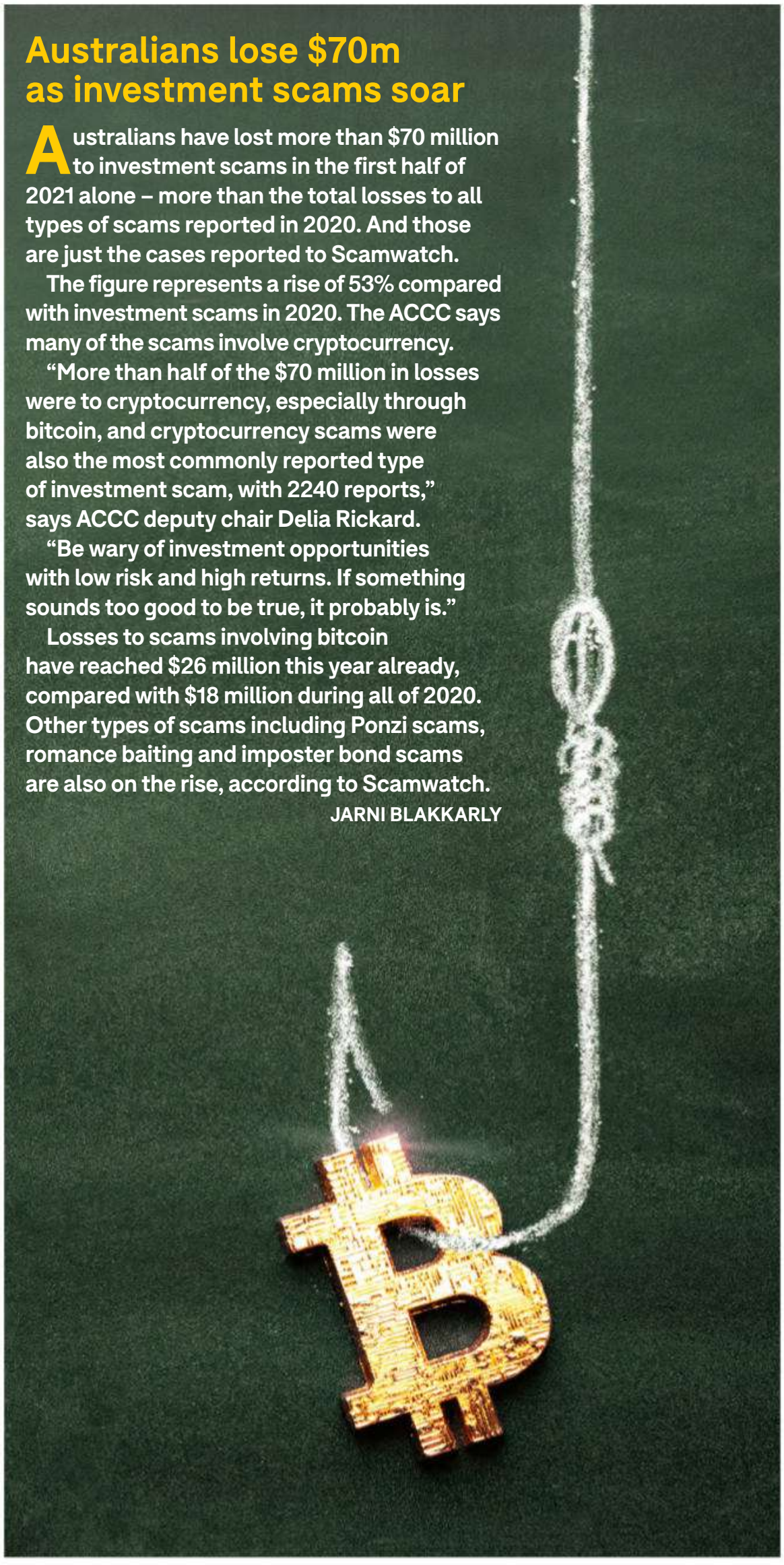
The figure represents a rise of 53% compared with investment scams in 2020. The ACCC says many of the scams involve cryptocurrency.

"More than half of the $70 million in losses were to cryptocurrency, especially through bitcoin, and cryptocurrency scams were also the most commonly reported type of investment scam, with 2240 reports," says ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard.

"Be wary of investment opportunities with low risk and high returns. If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is."

Losses to scams involving bitcoin have reached $26 million this year already, compared with $18 million during all of 2020. Other types of scams including Ponzi scams, romance baiting and imposter bond scams are also on the rise, according to Scamwatch.

JARNI BLAKKARLY



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A late fee – for paying on time

Charging people a late fee before they've paid is a pretty dodgy tactic in our view – and one we called out in the case of funeral services provider InvoCare back in November 2019.

At the time, InvoCare was charging customers a $352 'administration fee' as part of its normal billing process. If the customers paid on time, they got the money back – but only if they noticed the peremptory (non-negotiable) charge.

InvoCare scrapped this charge, but now another funeral provider, Alex Gow Funerals, has been caught out for the same tactic. As a result, the business recently paid a $13,320 fine after the ACCC issued it with an infringement notice. The $400 'Estate Fee' included in its invoices was actually a late payment fee in disguise.

"Funeral businesses must clearly describe the purpose of all fees included in their invoices, as well as the total price and due date for the invoice," says ACCC deputy chair Delia Rickard. "If a fee applies for late payment of an invoice, the late payment fee must be clearly stated and should not be included in the total amount due on invoices."

Since January 2020, 40 people had paid the 'Estate Fee' in error and had to be refunded.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

ALEX GOW FUNERALS

NAB ordered to pay $18.5m in penalties after fee breaches

National Australia Bank (NAB) has been ordered to pay penalties of $18.5 million after breaching laws relating to its disclosure of fees.

The Federal Court found that NAB breached the law on several occasions: when it charged fees for personal advice without disclosing fees to customers in a statement, when it failed to provide statements within the required timeframe, and when it made false and misleading representations.

"NAB's system failures resulted in significant fee disclosure failures over an extended period," says ASIC deputy chair Sarah Court. "This caused harm to customers, as the inaccurate information meant they couldn't make informed decisions about the financial services they were paying for.

"The penalty of $18.5 million handed down to NAB is a timely reminder to financial services licensees to ensure they meet their obligations to their clients."

NAB was also ordered to pay ASIC's legal costs.

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Too hot, too cold: CHOICE calls for minimum standards for renters

CHOICE recently teamed up with 75 advocacy organisations across Australia to write to state and territory cabinet ministers, calling for minimum standards for rental properties as climate change continues to affect weather patterns.

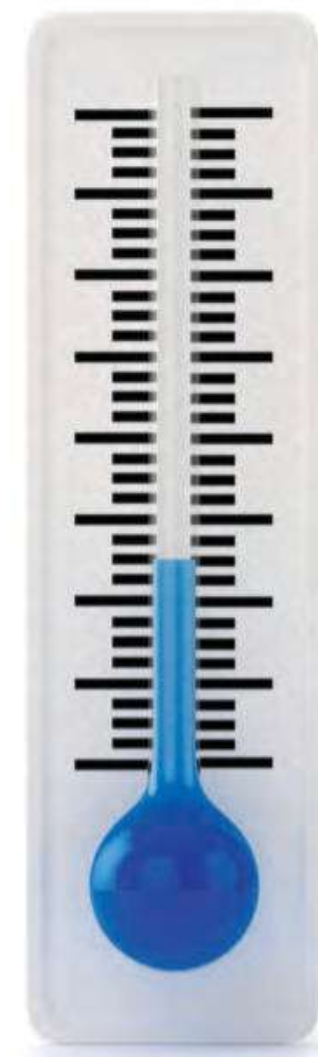
About one in three Australian households are rental properties, which often have problems with energy efficiency. It's harder – and costlier – to keep them warm in winter and cool in summer.

A recent national poll found that two in three renters find it hard to maintain a comfortable temperature in their homes. Cold indoor temperatures have been linked to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

Dr Kim Loo, a GP in Riverstone, NSW, and a member of Doctors for the Environment, says, "Housing and adequate shelter are social determinants of health. I can't expect to help my patients and keep them well if they are in insecure or unhealthy housing.

"During the 2019/2020 bushfires and the floods, my patients couldn't keep the smoke out or deal with the cold and damp, and that has long-term impacts on health."

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



RANTS AND RAVES

In praise of bricks-and-mortar shopping

I have a confession to make: I actually enjoy shopping at the supermarket. I know the rise of online shopping has seen many people ditch the instore experience in favour of cyber-shopping, but that just doesn't appeal to me.

Don't get me wrong, there were certainly times in my life when it was a dreaded chore that I would, without hesitation, palm off to my other half – navigating the temptations of Coles or Woolies with a demanding toddler in tow is not a memory I recollect fondly. There are even weeks these days, now all my children are young adults and no longer throw tantrums because I won't buy them a jumbo-sized pack of lollies, when I approach my trip with more enthusiasm than others. But, on the whole, I find it at least somewhat entertaining.

And it's not because I want to browse the aisles in a leisurely manner, examining in detail all the options available. Nor am I so lacking in human interaction that I use my visit to engage in a long chat with the guy at the deli. On the contrary, the reason I enjoy it is because of the weekly challenge I set myself: shop for my family for the coming week and beat my personal best supermarket run-through.

At the moment, the best I've managed is 48 minutes from the time I enter the supermarket to the time I return to my car. This kind of performance doesn't happen accidentally. It starts with the shopping list. Compiled based on the weekly menu and the list I keep through the week of staples that have run out and need replacing, it is written out by aisle and section. Woe betide the person who hurriedly scrawls something on the list once it's written, forcing me to backtrack to aisle two for a pack of coffee filters – your thoughtless addition just added three minutes to my visit.

Once I arrive at the supermarket, a key choice faces me: which trolley will I select? That wonky wheel becomes a much bigger deal with there's a new record at stake. There are other decisions I need to make on the go, too: should I hit the deli before the fresh fruit and veg if there's no queue, even though it means a minor doubling-back is required? It's these choices that can cost valuable seconds.

Alas, my son's request for a specific brand of deodorant has cost me extra minutes

I also need to select my checkout carefully. Corazon on checkout four is serving one person with another waiting, while young Will on checkout two has one person unloading a large trolley and nobody else in the queue. But I know Corazon is fast and efficient, while Will is unproven. Corazon gets my vote.

When it comes time to pay I have my card out, ready to tap and enter my PIN. I've already answered "no" to the query about loyalty programs before the question is out of Corazon's mouth. Now I just need to make it back to the car (tip: choose a spot that's a straight line from the exit, even if a slightly closer spot is just around the corner: a full trolley is not built for cornering). I stop the clock and note my time. Alas, my son's request for a specific brand of deodorant has cost me extra minutes this week and the record remains unbroken.

So that's why I love my trip to the supermarket – an online shop or click-and-collect can never beat the thrill of knowing I've just set my new PB. And who knows, next week could be the day I smash through the 45-minute mark. All I'm saying is, if you see a determined-looking middle-aged woman striding past the dairy cabinet, you'd better stay out of the way.

MARGARET RAFFERTY

IMAGES: GETTY

ASK THE EXPERTS

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

ASK US

Email your question to **asktheexperts@choice.com.au** or write to Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204.
You can also tap into the 'brains trust' at **www.choice.community**.

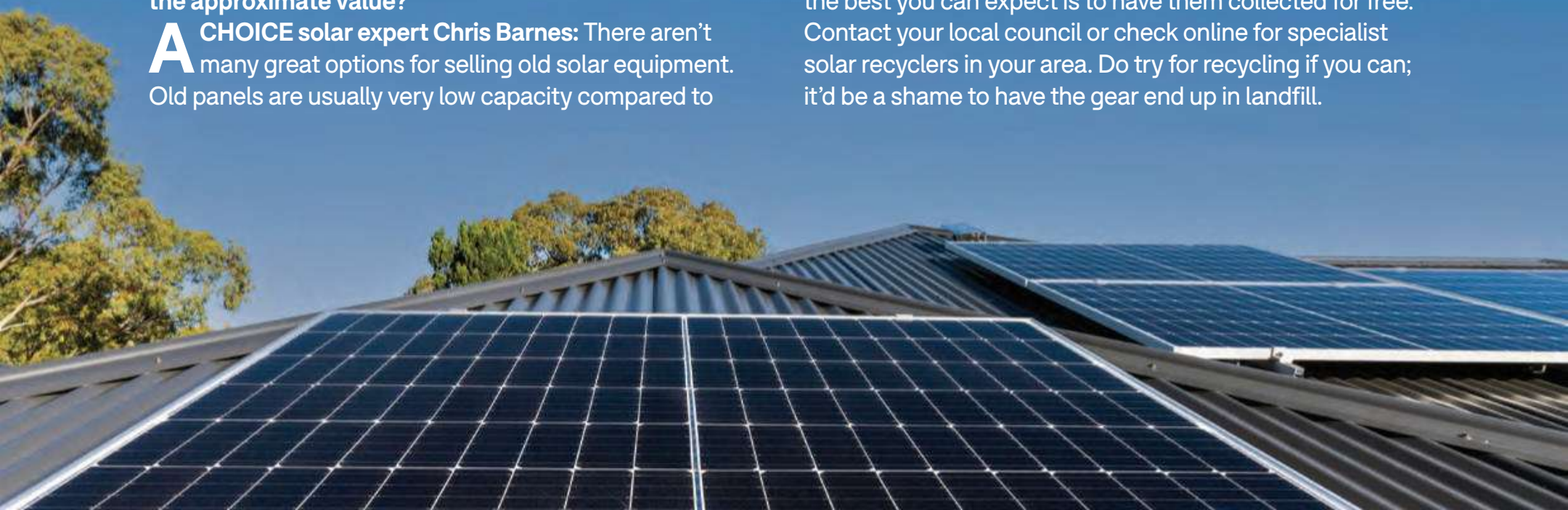
Q Due to lockdowns, I have had to cancel several flights and have got credits. Most of them will be due to expire before I can use them, especially as I live in WA and interstate travel is difficult. Will airlines let them expire and keep the funds, extend the credits, or refund the cost of the flights?

A CHOICE travel expert Jodi Bird: The ACCC has advised that it expects Australian businesses to extend expiry periods of credit notes to take into account travel restrictions and allow people a reasonable period to use their credit. The Australian domestic airlines have increased the validity of their flight credits several times so people have the opportunity to use them. Qantas flight credits, for example, are currently valid until 31 December 2023.

If you have credits with international airlines, this may be more complicated. Technically, international companies are subject to Australian consumer law if they're selling in Australia. But in reality it can be difficult to enforce Australian consumer law on overseas companies. International airlines, however, should hopefully have hardship policies that you can appeal to, or try complaining on their social media accounts if you're not getting a satisfactory outcome.

Q We have recently had our solar system replaced with a new one. We would like to sell our old system, some of which is working well. Could you advise me as to where to sell and how I could obtain a quote of the approximate value?

A CHOICE solar expert Chris Barnes: There aren't many great options for selling old solar equipment. Old panels are usually very low capacity compared to current models, and the inverter might not be up to current standards. There may be little option but to have them scrapped and recycled. You can try selling the items second hand, but don't expect much for them. Probably the best you can expect is to have them collected for free. Contact your local council or check online for specialist solar recyclers in your area. Do try for recycling if you can; it'd be a shame to have the gear end up in landfill.



Q I have Silver Plus hospital cover, which includes dental surgery. The privatehealth.gov.au website gives the example that dental surgery includes surgery to remove wisdom teeth and get dental implants. These are the procedures that I am having done, so I expected that my Silver Plus plan would cover most of the costs, less any gap. However, my health fund is not coming to the party because Medicare does not cover wisdom tooth extraction and dental implant surgery, and therefore it is excluded from private hospital cover? Maybe the government needs to either correct the misleading statement on its website, and/or the health funds need to explain better what they are and are not covering?

A CHOICE health expert Uta Mihm: To get cover for wisdom teeth or dental implant surgery in a hospital you need both hospital and extras insurance. Silver-level hospital insurance pays for theatre, anaesthesia and accommodation, as for any surgery you're covered for. (Make sure the hospital is an agreement hospital otherwise there may be out-of-pocket costs, and you may also have out-of-pocket costs if the anaesthetist charges more than the MBS fee.) Extras insurance covers the cost of the dentist or dental surgeon and there's no difference if they do it in their rooms or in hospital. Make sure you get a quote from the dentist or dental surgeon beforehand so that you can check with your fund how much of the cost it'll cover. The quote should include the dental item numbers for the procedure, the cost of the procedure and their name and provider number. If you don't already have extras cover and are taking it up for this surgery, remember that there'll be a waiting period before you can use it for that.

Q I received a letter from my superannuation fund saying that my product has performed poorly under an annual performance test that was introduced by the Australian Government. It says I should consider moving my money into a different superannuation product. What should I do next?

A CHOICE superannuation expert Daniel Herborn: If you get one of these letters, it means your fund has failed the government's new 'basic fitness test' for managing your money. Unless you have a specific reason to stay with a fund assessed as "underperforming", you should think about switching to a fund that can better build your retirement income. We recommend you use the personalised version of the Australian Taxation Office's super fund comparison tool (you can sign in with your MyGov account) for an overview of how all the MySuper products have done on returns and the fees they charge. This version allows you to enter your age and super balance (make sure you're using an up-to-date balance from your fund) to see how each fund compares based on your specific circumstances.

When looking at the performance of the different funds in the tool, keep in mind that seemingly minor differences can have a massive impact over time. The tool will also display fees for each fund. Higher fees don't mean you will get a better product; by the same token, the fund with the lowest fees isn't automatically the best. The key is to find a fund with strong long-term performance and competitive fees. Also weigh up the disability insurance that's bundled with super.

Some funds offer insurance that's harder to claim on (but still costs the same) for members who are working casually, part-time, as carers or those who are out of the workforce. Similarly, some funds make it harder for you to claim if you're working in an occupation they deem 'hazardous'. If you're interested in joining a fund, it's worth contacting them and asking if any restrictive terms would apply to someone in your employment situation.

The specifics of moving your super vary slightly from fund to fund but start by contacting the fund you've chosen. This process is free and easier than you might imagine; some funds can transfer your super for you in as little as 15 minutes.

IMAGES: GETTY

YOUR SAY

If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

CONTACT US!

Email us at
yoursay@choice.com.au
or write to Your Say,
CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road,
Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Blow-dry bargain

I have subscribed to *CHOICE* magazine for over 37 years now. I find your reviews and articles most helpful in my daily consumer choices and the most expensive consumer item doesn't always mean the best. CHOICE highlights this so many times. The best example is the Kambrook $29 toaster. We have friends who make purchase decisions based on the idea that the best is the most expensive. Their Dyson $549 hairdryer failed after five years. We purchased a $30 VS Sassoon Pro Dryer VSD 120 around the same time based on the CHOICE review and it's still working. It's not small or a metallic colour with smooth round lines, but its job is to dry hair, not win a beauty contest. Keep up the great work.

Chris, Sydney, NSW

I loaded my 13-year-old Bosch dishwasher a few months ago and to my horror smoke started coming out of it within minutes of being turned on. Naturally I turned it off immediately and got in touch with Bosch. They sent a technician out who said it was the electronics and I would probably get a discount on a new one. Bosch customer service called me a week later and said they would replace the dishwasher as the required parts to repair it were no longer available. And they did. I couldn't believe it!!

Liz Brown, Melbourne, Vic

I was involved in a car accident that was not my fault. After searching for my insurance policy documents, I realised to my horror that my car was not insured. When the other party's insurer, Budget Direct, called, I was dreading a drawn-out fight but was pleasantly surprised. They told me it wasn't my fault, booked my car in for repair the next week and offered me a hire car. I dropped my car off at the crash repairer in the morning then they sent me a link for an Uber to take me home. Amazing service for someone who isn't even their customer.

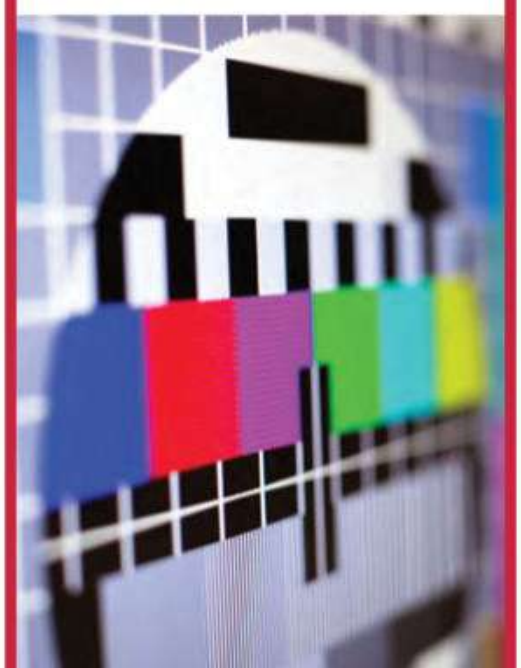
Steve Went, Newstead, Qld

Our Phoenix Tapware shower hand piece had a leak. We contacted customer service who suggested we log on to their website to provide a description and photo. We did this and within two hours they advised that a replacement part was being sent by express mail. Well done Phoenix Tapware.

Carol Jackson, Werribee, Vic

Four months ago our LG OLED 45" TV developed a colour problem – obvious when watching AFL as all yellow became lime green! The TV was 2.5 years old, and out of the 12-month guarantee. But, thanks to CHOICE instilling in me our consumer rights, after many long phone calls to LG in Manila, a local TV repairer came and replaced the whole screen. I have been a CHOICE member for a very long time and this is the first time I have had to use this knowledge.

Diana Macmillan, Frankston, Vic



IMAGES: GETTY

CHOICE SOCIAL MEDIA

Join the conversation online. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and our own forum, CHOICE Community. This month: online grocery shopping, scratchy towels and more.

Community

choice.community

How much money do you need to retire?

@BassaJack: I am a retired CPA and get asked about financially surviving retirement. I always reply, "see a financial planner", and then proceed to outline how to source such a person. The reality is reflected in Brendan Mays' expression, "There's no 'one-size-fits-all'."

@yoda1: Even people who have saved well can never be sure, so here is our rule: You can safely retire when the compulsory annual takeout of your super pension fund equals your current after tax take-home pay. Until at least age 75 on current rules the compulsory drawdown of 4% to age 65 and 5% age 65–75 will be less than the median balanced super fund long term earnings of 7–8% by about the inflation rate. That way you can be sure you can live as well as you are while working without forcing drawdown.

@Mim: At retirement we used our bank's financial adviser. He handled everything and continues to do so and we are balancing out well. The only downside was moving into a retirement village 15 years ago as it now seems impossible to sell it for enough to move, should we ever need to.

Facebook

facebook.com/choiceaustralia

@choiceaustralia: What stops you getting your broken products repaired?

Hanson: Once I tried getting a quote to get my shoes fixed. The money asked for can actually get a new pair and a daily coffee dose for a week.

Johanna: Price of repairs ... cheaper to buy a new product. Plus, parts are short-lived and just about impossible to get after about two years.

Rachel: I tried repairing something; broke it even worse.

Twitter

twitter.com/choiceaustralia

@choiceaustralia: Have you ordered groceries online during a lockdown?

@gemtweetalot: I am doing a click and collect from Woolies to the boot of my car. It's fantastic, but would be ideal if it could be the same day. Very glad I can direct them to NOT bag my loose fruit & veg and I can BYO bags.

@Eli111111111: I tried but gave up for the following reasons: Deliveries late, delivery people appear to be under ++pressure and I'm concerned re their work loads, food frequently out of date/off, food items ordered frequently out of stock so I have to go to the shops anyway.

@vombatus2: We are in quarantine so we cannot leave the house. Coles cancelled our order an hour before delivery time (five days after the initial order).

Instagram

instagram.com/choiceaustralia/

@choiceaustralia: How do you like your towels – scratchy, somewhere in between or soft?

@paulapitstop: Satisfyingly scratchy!!

@misswonderstone: Honestly, scratchy!!?? Who?? Why?? Who hurt you??

@popusername: Heavy, thick and soft. ■

Champion cheddar

Unsure which cheddar to pick from the cheese platter? **Rachel Clemons** has a nose for a winner

Australians love their cheese. Last year more than 250,000 tonnes of it was sold within Australia – the majority through supermarkets – which works out at almost 14kg per person, according to Dairy Australia. And despite a gradual decline in sales over recent years, about half of the cheese we eat is cheddar.

Not only is it versatile – think cheese scones, macaroni cheese, melted cheese on toast or grated for a gratin – a good vintage cheddar holds its own on a specialty cheese platter.

Paying a premium

You often pay a premium for the 'vintage' or 'mature' label, which seems reasonable given that – in theory – you're getting a premium cheese that has been allowed more time for complex, lasting flavours to develop.

So to find the cheddars worth paying the premium for, our panel of expert judges sniffed, prodded and chewed their way through 27 aged supermarket cheddars.

They judged each cheese on its flavour, aroma, texture and appearance, looking for cheese with a sweet, milky flavour, a good balance of salt and acid, a texture that's firm, close and slightly crumbly, and a lingering aftertaste. See 'How we test cheddar cheese' for details.

Best cheddar cheese

The following six matured cheddars topped the rest, achieving a CHOICE Expert Rating of 70% or more.

King Island Dairy Surprise Bay Cheddar

- **CHOICE Expert Rating**: 73%
- **Price**: $5.50 per 100g
- **Country of origin**: Australia
- **Tasting notes**: "Mildly sweet cheddar aroma. Flavour well balanced – fruity/milky/nutty. Nice calcium lactate crystals on the outside. Good, firm texture. Mild but clean bite and finish."

Barber's 1833 Vintage Reserve Cheddar

- **CHOICE Expert Rating**: 72%
- **Price**: $5.00 per 100g
- **Country of origin**: UK
- **Tasting notes**: "Strong, savoury aroma. Good dry and crumbly texture, even distribution of calcium lactate crystals with evident crunch. Umami finish. Good vintage cheddar in terms of aroma, taste and texture."

Thomas Dux 18 Month Aged Cheddar

- **CHOICE Expert Rating**: 72%
- **Price**: $1.84 per 100g
- **Country of origin**: UK
- **Tasting notes**: "Good, strong, cheddar aroma. Calcium lactate deposits on exterior surface. Good dry and crumbly texture, with nice crunch on the paste. Nice, solid cheddar bite. Clean mouthfeel and

complexity of flavour. Savoury, malty, sweet finish. Yum."

Thomas Dux 24 Month Aged Cheddar

- **CHOICE Expert Rating**: 72%
- **Price**: $2.30 per 100g
- **Country of origin**: UK
- **Tasting notes**: "Good appearance with calcium lactate crystals evident on the surface. Nice cheddar aroma, good crumbly texture throughout. Great flavour – bright, clean, complex, persistent. Fruity with savoury, salty finish."

Thomas Dux English Vintage Cheddar

- **CHOICE Expert Rating**: 71%
- **Price**: $2.25 per 100g
- **Country of origin**: UK
- **Tasting notes**: "Strong, fruity cheddar aroma. Texture good with nice crystals, slight crumble on cutting. Matured nicely. Malty flavour with a marzipan/nutty butter finish. Milky. Soft, even bite from start to finish."

Coles Australian Vintage Cheddar

- **CHOICE Expert Rating**: 70%
- **Price**: $1.60 per 100g
- **Country of origin**: Australia
- **Tasting notes**: "Good looking piece of cheese. Some calcium lactate evident on the surface. Good complexity and umami note. True cheddar. Texture slightly crumbly but cohesive. Very punchy flavour, good acid and salt balance. Nice clean, sharp bite at the end."

Is it mature, aged or vintage cheddar?

Terms such as 'mild', 'mature', 'tasty' and 'vintage' are frequently used on packs of cheddar, but what do they actually mean? Dairy Australia classifies cheddar as follows:

- mild (matures for one to three months)
- semi-matured (matures for three to six months)
- matured or tasty (matures for six to 12 months)
- vintage (matures for 12 to 24 months).

But according to our experts, these definitions aren't strictly adhered to.

PACKAGING CLUES

Some manufacturers use pack colour to indicate age – you might find 'mature' cheddars in a red pack, and 'vintage' cheddars in black, for example. And some provide a strength indicator, with a lower number indicating a mild (or young) cheese, and a higher number indicating a stronger (more mature) cheese.

But these systems are really only useful for comparing products within a brand, as the age represented by each colour and the strength number scales aren't consistent between brands.

Cheddar cheese production

To make cheese, two important ingredients are added to milk: cultures (special bacteria that convert the milk lactose to lactic acid) and enzymes (rennet). Depending on the desired outcome, the resulting cheese can be left to mature.

The species and strains of bacteria used in the starter culture can affect the texture and flavour of the matured cheese.

A more mature flavour can be manipulated by using different adjunct cultures to enhance cheddar flavours in a shorter period of time. But a true aged cheddar texture can't be faked – crunchy calcium lactate crystals in the body of the cheese, a typical feature of aged cheddars, only start to appear after long periods of maturation.

WHERE DOES RENNET COME FROM?

The rennet enzymes used in cheese production were traditionally extracted from the stomachs of newborn calves, but non-animal microbial rennet is now commonly used.

Of the cheddar cheeses we tested, the following six contain animal rennet, so aren't suitable for vegetarians:

- Mainland Epicure Aged up to 32 Months
- Mainland Extra Tasty Aged up to 18 Months
- Mainland Vintage Aged up to 24 Months
- Mersey Valley Classic Club Cheddar Vintage Sharp & Crumbly
- Mersey Valley Original Club Cheddar Vintage Sharp & Crumbly
- South Cape Vintage Club Cheddar. ▸

IMAGE: GETTY

How we test cheddar cheese

PRODUCTS

We test cheddar products that are available in major supermarket and grocery chains. We've included products that say 'Vintage or 'Extra Mature' in the product name and/or are labelled with a maturation of 12 months or more. Price is based on a 250g pack (or closest) bought in Sydney stores (not on special).

TASTING

Cheddar blocks are unwrapped and placed on coded plates immediately before the test. Our experts taste the cheddar samples 'blind' (without knowing the brands) and in a randomised order, which is different for each expert.

SCORES

Experts independently judge all cheddar products, scoring each sample for appearance/presentation, flavour, aroma, texture and body.

The CHOICE Expert Rating is made up of taste 70% (50% flavour and aroma, 30% texture and body, 20% appearance/presentation) and nutrition 30% (based on the product's Health Star Rating, calculated from the details in the nutrition information panel and converted to a percentage).

We recommend cheddar cheese with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 70% or more.

Meet our expert judges

Adam Moore is a prolific culinary judge. His credits include judging for Le Cordon Bleu cooking school and Royal Agricultural Society (RAS) Fine Food competitions across a range of categories, including dairy.

Adam has formal qualifications in pastry, charcuterie and butchery, sensory evaluation, food styling and food photography. With more than 25 years in the industry, he has worked in restaurants, food service, retail, food manufacturing, marketing and sales. He's a certified global executive chef, and culinology director at Culinary Revolutions. At home, he's a hobbyist cheesemaker.

Robyn Gray has worked in the food and flavour industry for more than 30 years, with a technical background focused in ice cream and general dairy textures, and more recently flavour delivery systems.

Robyn regularly exercises her expertise on judging panels for Australian food competitions, including the Australian Grand Dairy Awards (AGDA).

Penny Lawson is a self-confessed 'curd nerd', with 20 years' experience in the food industry, including dairy judging at RAS produce competitions in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and the AGDA. She's been at the forefront of the specialty cheese sector as a retailer and commentator, and is a passionate supporter and promoter of Australian producers.

At one point Penny moved to London and worked at La Fromagerie... all to get closer to the source of cheddar. You can find her at Penny's Cheese Shop in Potts Point, Sydney.

Petra Sugiarto has an academic background in food science and technology and food microbiology and has been working in the food industry for more than 20 years, in particular the dairy industry in various applications including yoghurt, cheese, ice cream/gelato, desserts and additionally in plant-based applications.

For the past 16 years Petra has been on the judging panels for the Dairy Industry Association of Australia (DIAA NSW and Vic), Sydney RAS in the Cheese & Dairy Produce competitions and for the AGDA.

Andre Sandison has worked as a pastry chef in hotels, restaurants and production patisseries in Japan, Britain, Switzerland and around Australia for more than 25 years. He has competed in patisserie and gelato competitions both nationally and internationally, in Singapore, France and Italy, with success.

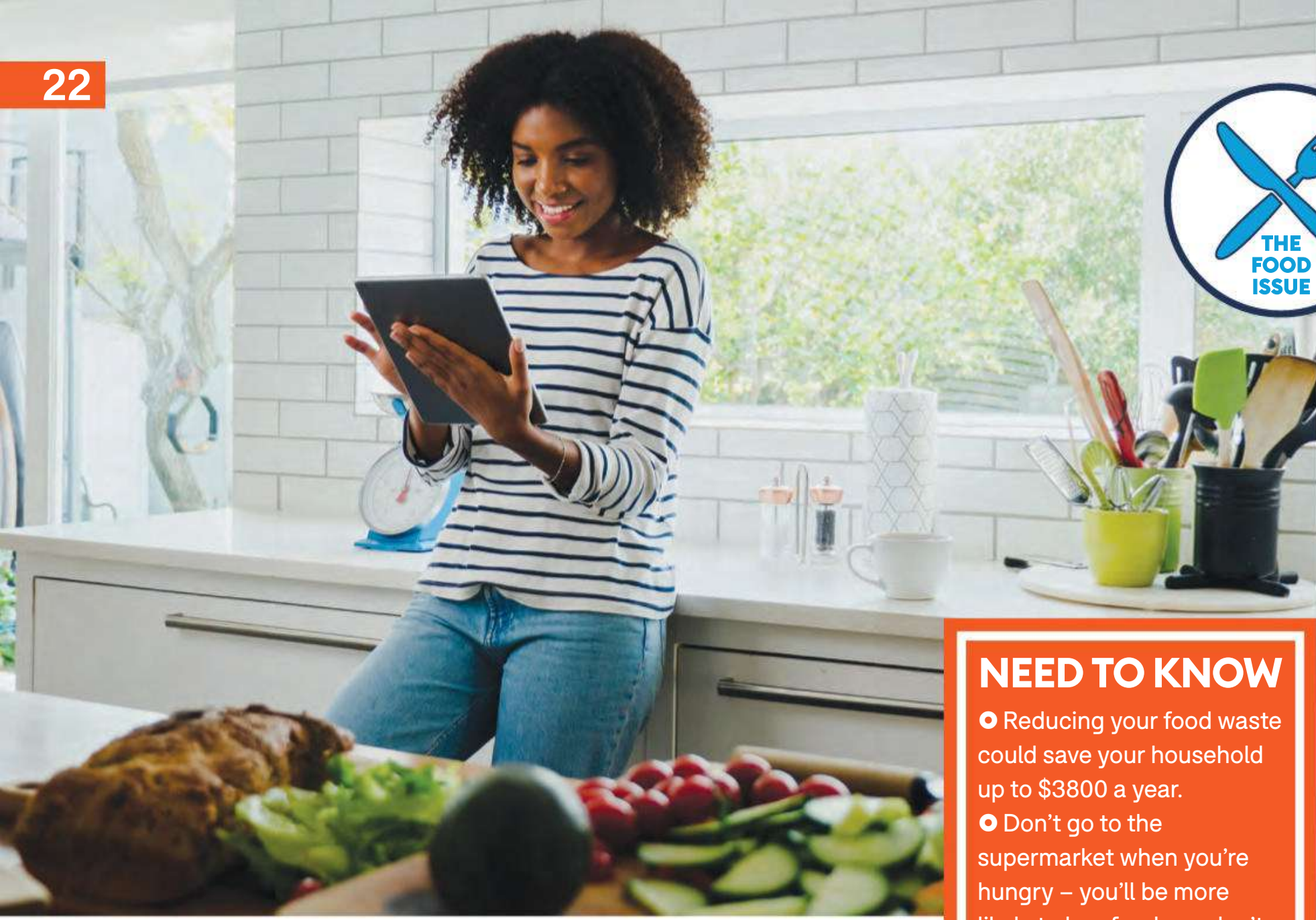
Andre loves craftwork and, in a pandemic, thinks that getting back to basics where there is a focus on simplicity and quality is more important than ever.

VINTAGE CHEESE

		COSTS			PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS								
Recommended		Pack size (g)	Pack price ($)	Price per 100g ($)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Taste test score (%)	Nutrition score (%)	Maturation time	Energy per 100g (kJ)	Protein per 100g (g)	Fat per 100g (g)	Saturated fat per 100g (g)	Sodium per 100g (mg)	Calcium per 100g (mg)	Vegetarian
✓	**King Island Dairy** Surprise Bay Cheddar	170	9.35	5.50	73	74	70	Minimum of 12 months	1580	26.6	30	19.1	655	770	✓
✓	**Thomas Dux** 18 Month Aged Cheddar	250	4.60	1.84	72	85	40	18 months	1720	23.4	34.4	22.4	664	ns	✓
✓	**Thomas Dux** 24 Month Aged Cheddar	200	4.60	2.30	72	81	50	24 months	1720	22.4	34.3	21.7	703	ns	✓
✓	**Barber's** 1833 Vintage Reserve Cheddar	190	9.50	5.00	72	81	50	24 months	1700	25	34.4	21.7	670	ns	✓
✓	**Thomas Dux** English Vintage Cheddar	200	4.50	2.25	71	80	50	12 months	1700	25	34.4	21.7	700	ns	✓
✓	**Coles** Australian Vintage Cheddar	250	4.00	1.60	70	88	30	ns	1730	24.6	35.4	25.3	675	687	✓
	Maffra Cheese Co Mature Cheddar	150	6.49	4.33	68	76	50	ns	1660	26	32.5	22.5	600	740	✓
	Warrnambool Heritage The Aged Vintage	250	5.99	2.40	68	80	40	Up to 18 months	1750	27	34	23.5	640	750	✓
	Aldi Emporium Selection 36 Month Aged Cheddar Extra Sharp Cheddar Cheese	200	3.99	2.00	68	80	40	36 months	1750	27	34	23.5	640	750	✓
	Coles Australian Extra Tasty Cheddar	250	4.00	1.60	67	83	30	ns	1730	24.6	35.4	25.3	675	687	✓
	Godminster Vintage Organic Cheddar	200	10.99	5.50	66	77	40	ns	1725	25.4	34.9	21.7	723	ns	✓
	Mainland Epicure Aged up to 32 Months	200	6.00	3.00	66	77	40	Up to 32 months	1790	22.6	37.4	22.5	692	760	
	Snowdonia Cheese Company Black Bomber Extra Mature Cheddar	150	8.50	5.67	66	77	40	ns	1714	23.6	34.1	22.8	670	ns	✓
	Bega Strong & Bitey Vintage	250	6.00	2.40	66	77	40	ns	1720	24.8	34.7	23.8	650	738	✓
	Great Ocean Road Vintage	500	7.00	1.40	65	75	40	ns	1750	27	34	23.5	640	750	✓
	Coles Vintage Cheddar	200	4.05	2.25	65	76	40	15 months	1720	25.4	34.9	21.7	723	ns	✓
	Mainland Extra Tasty Aged up to 18 Months	250	5.50	2.20	63	74	40	Up to 18 months	1800	23.3	37.4	22.5	696	760	
	Warrnambool Heritage Vintage Club	200	6.80	3.40	63	73	40	ns	1750	27	34	23.5	650	750	✓
	Ashgrove Aged Full Flavoured Vintage Cheddar	140	6.05	4.32	61	66	50	Up to 18 months	1684	25.4	33	21.5	655	ns	✓
	Cracker Barrel The Vintage Cheddar Extra Sharp	250	6.60	2.64	61	70	40	Up to 20 months	1750	25.8	34	23.5	730	750	✓
	Mersey Valley Classic Club Cheddar Vintage Sharp & Crumbly	235	7.90	3.36	60	69	40	ns	1740	24.8	33	21.1	762	725	
	Cracker Barrel The Vintage Cheddar Special Reserve	250	6.80	2.72	60	73	30	Up to 32 months	1750	25.8	34	23.5	730	750	✓
	Mainland Vintage Aged up to 24 Months	200	5.50	2.75	59	68	40	Up to 24 months	1800	23.3	37.4	22.5	696	760	
	Dairyworks Tasty Natural Block	210	4.50	2.14	57	65	40	Up to 18 months	1790	23.3	37.4	22.5	692	760	✓
	Mersey Valley Original Club Cheddar Vintage Sharp & Crumbly	235	7.90	3.36	57	59	50	ns	1740	24.8	33	21.1	720	741	
	South Cape Vintage Club Cheddar	140	5.00	3.57	56	68	30	ns	1750	25.7	35	23.5	800	735	
	Dairyworks Extra Sharp Cheddar Natural Block	180	4.50	2.50	55	61	40	Up to 36 months	1790	23.3	37.4	22.5	692	760	✓

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend cheddar cheese with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 70% or more. **Price** is based on a 250g pack (or closest) bought in Sydney stores (not on special). **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of taste (70%) and nutrition (30%). **Vegetarian** Cheeses identified as vegetarian are free from animal rennet. **ns** Not stated. ■

IMAGE: GETTY



THE FOOD ISSUE

NEED TO KNOW

- Reducing your food waste could save your household up to $3800 a year.
- Don't go to the supermarket when you're hungry – you'll be more likely to buy food you don't need and won't eat.
- For health reasons, never eat food past its use-by date, even if it looks and smells OK.

Leftover love

Amy Potter has some tips for shopping, storing and cooking your food to reduce food waste at home

Food waste mostly happens when we buy too much food, cook too much or don't store things properly. And according to the Love Food Hate Waste project, more than $10 billion worth of good food is wasted each year in NSW alone.

Food waste takes a toll on your wallet, but also on the environment. As it decomposes in landfill, it releases methane – a greenhouse gas and big contributor to climate change.

"What we eat, and how we purchase and waste it, has a significant impact on the climate," says Annika Stott, sustainability strategist at OzHarvest.

"While there's no silver bullet to tackle this global problem, there are many things we can be doing and it starts with getting into good habits."

1. Make a list

Work out what's on the family menu for the week ahead, and who'll be home for meals, and you'll be less likely to buy things you don't need (and won't use).

"Take stock of food in your pantry and fridge before planning your meals for the week and use those items first as your inspiration," says CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair.

2. Get inspiration

Not sure how to use up that lonely zucchini? Many recipe websites let you search their databases by ingredient.

3. Stick to your shopping list

Stick to your list so you won't get tempted by deals that encourage you to buy more than you need. If you can't resist a promotion, perhaps see if a friend or neighbour wants to go halves.

4. Learn the lingo

Read food labels while out shopping to make sure you'll use ingredients in time. 'Best before' dates tell you when foods will start to lose quality, whereas 'Use by' dates tell you when something must be eaten by.

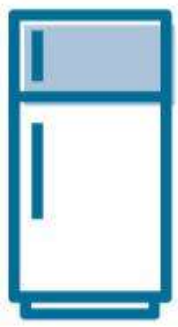
5. Shop smaller and more often

Buying all your fresh produce once a week means you run the risk of things going off before you can use them. Making a mid-week pit stop for fresh fruit and vegies can help cut down on waste.

6. Store food better

Storing your food correctly can help increase shelf life and prevent waste. Try investing in quality, reusable and sealable storage containers to keep food fresh, or experimenting with popular storage hacks.

7. Make friends with your freezer



Your freezer is one of the best – and easiest – ways to preserve food.

"Ripe bananas can be peeled, cut in half and placed in a freezer container," says Fiona. "They're great blended into smoothies – and there's no need to add ice."

It's also worth portioning up meat and fish before you freeze them, so you don't have to defrost them in bulk and risk wasting any down the line.

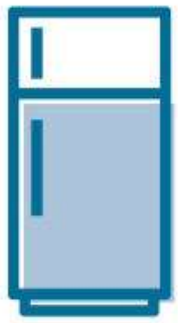
8. Stretch your ingredients

Rather than throwing away potato peelings, make them into chips. That roast chicken carcass? Turn it into stock and freeze it ready for the next time you make soup or gravy.

9. Learn about portion sizes

Being aware of healthy portion sizes can help you shop and cook more efficiently. Try using an online calculator to nail the perfect amount for your household and avoid cooking more than you need.

10. Keep tabs on your fridge



Pencil in regular catch-ups with the contents of your fridge to make sure there's nothing lurking that a) you could use or b) is kicking off a fetid funk.

"Choose a day in the week where you use up leftover fruits and vegetables," advises Fiona. "I choose Sundays, just before a big shop, and usually make a soup or a stew with canned beans and vegetables that are looking a little weary."

11. Use up your leftovers

Portions to spare? Enjoy leftovers for lunch the next day – it'll save waste and your wallet. Or freeze portions of larger dishes such as lasagne for another time.

12. Get creative with leftovers

"Ready-rolled pastry in the freezer is such a handy food to have when it comes to leftovers," says Fiona. "You can make savoury pies filled with leftover stews, bolognese and casseroles, or use overripe fruits for making fruit pies."

You could also fry any leftover vegies from your Sunday roast to make 'bubble and squeak', or whizz up soft-leaf herbs with nuts, lemon, olive oil and garlic to make pesto.

13. Compost

"Landfills are incredibly inefficient and we must get organic matter out of our red bins," says Stott. One solution? Composting.

Two popular options are the bokashi system, which involves microorganisms fermenting your waste into a liquid compost (perfect fodder for your houseplants), and worm composting. You can buy easy-to-use starter kits for both at your local hardware store.

"Some local councils offer advice and assistance, or even discounted compost bins and worm farm products," adds Fiona.

14. Food waste collection

Some food items will inevitably end up in your bin but more and more councils are providing kerbside collection services for food waste, so see what's available in your area. ■

IMAGES: GETTY

Shelf life

THE FOOD ISSUE

What happens when supermarkets deliver out-of-date food?
Rachel Clemons reports

More people are doing their grocery shopping online than ever before. And there are clear benefits, such as being able to shop when you want and avoiding contact with others during COVID-19 restrictions.

But online grocery shopping isn't all smooth sailing. One complaint we hear often is of food being delivered that's close to or past its date marking.

It could be a 3L bottle of milk that expires in 24 hours; an expensive fillet steak bought as a treat for an anniversary dinner on the weekend that has to be eaten on the day of delivery instead; or a bag of salad mix that's already past its use-by date.

It might be a minor inconvenience, but sometimes it's a major disruption, and can even pose a health risk.

So how prevalent is this complaint, and what can you do to prevent it happening to you?

In July we surveyed 431 online grocery shoppers from the CHOICE research community (Voice Your Choice) and here's what they told us.

Almost half (46%) of the people we surveyed have received an online order with short-dated food products

Short-dated food deliveries

Almost half (46%) of the people we surveyed have received an online order with short-dated food products, – at, or close to, their date markings.

Chilled milk (44%), chilled meat (36%), packaged salad/vegetables/herbs (29%) and yoghurt (21%) were the foods most often delivered with a less than ideal shelf life.

While you might buy a short-dated product instore if you know you can use it that day (or you're drawn to its marked-down price), having one foisted on you can be irritating.

Jessica says: "I received meat that would have needed to be consumed in the next six hours to remain in date. I had already cooked that night's dinner so it was wasted."

"I received a branded loaf of rye bread that expired the day I click-and-collected it," says Rachel. "But I didn't realise until it went mouldy the next day and had to be thrown out."

"It's pretty annoying to get a week's worth of groceries only to find all the

meat will need to be used in a couple of days. I don't generally check the use-by date on dairy goods but have been caught out with a large tub of yoghurt being past the use-by date when I went to use it a couple of days later," says Gina.

Almost eight in 10 (78%) respondents told us they wouldn't have selected that particular product had they been instore, and for almost four in 10 (38%) it meant a change to their weekly meal planning in order to consume the product before the expiry date.

"I often find myself cooking several meals at once and freezing them if I'm not careful in my purchases," says Lee.

Some respondents even speculated whether sending short-dated products was a tactic to get rid of products close to the end of their shelf life.

"Would be interesting to know if shoppers are directed to use up short-dated products on online orders," says Chris.

Out-of-date food deliveries

Reports of out-of-date food being delivered were less common, but 13% of those surveyed had received food products in an online shop that were past their date markings: 7% received products past their use-by date, 8% received products past their best before date, and 4% received products past their expiry date (but weren't sure if it was the use-by or best before date).

The products most commonly past their date markings were:

- packaged salads/vegetables/herbs (38%)
- yoghurts (25%)
- chilled meat (24%)
- chilled milk (22%)
- cheese (20%)
- bakery cakes/sweet treats (16%)
- chilled ready meals (15%).

Can you avoid expiry date dramas?

When you're shopping instore you can check the date marking on a product's label and reach to the back of the cabinet for an alternative with a longer shelf life. Clearly you don't have this option when shopping online, so are there measures in place to ensure you don't receive unreasonably short-dated or even out-of-date food products?

Supermarket giants Coles and Woolworths dominate the online grocery shopping industry in Australia, so we reached out to them for comment.

A Coles spokesperson says: "We aim to stock only fresh products of the highest quality in all of our fresh food departments.

"When packing Coles Online orders our team members follow strict guidelines that detail the minimum use-by date acceptance – these differ across our fresh produce categories including dairy, meat, bakery and eggs."

But they add, "We don't currently offer our customers the choice to select specific use-by dates for individual items."

Woolworths' online shopping platform has more functionality. ▸

Date marking definitions

Date marks indicate the shelf life of a food – the length of time it should keep before its quality begins to deteriorate or, in some cases, it becomes less nutritious or unsafe. All food with a shelf life of less than two years must carry a date marking, and there are two main types:

- **Best before** is the date up until which you'd expect a food to retain all of its quality attributes – colour, taste, texture and flavour – provided the package is unopened and it has been stored correctly. It's safe to eat past this date, but quality may have diminished.
- **Use-by** is the last date on which the food is safe to eat, provided the package is unopened and it has been stored correctly. After this date the food shouldn't be eaten due to health and safety reasons.
- **Short-dated** is an expression used to describe a product that's at, or very close to, its date marking.

IMAGE: GETTY / DALLAS KILPONEN/WOOLWORTHS / COLES

A Woolworths spokesperson tells us: “Our dedicated personal shoppers hand-pick fruit and veg for online orders to meet the unique requests of our customers. This can include picking an underripe banana for later in the week or a ready to eat avocado for that night’s dinner.

“Customers can let us know about their preferences by adding to the notes in their online order, and our personal shoppers will do their best to meet their needs based on the stock available at the time.”

Many survey respondents had a positive experience using this feature.

“I now make a note asking for a long expiry on meat. Haven’t had a problem since,” says Erin.

Kerry says: “I like that when you buy items like bananas you can ask for some that are yet to ripen … I’ve also learnt you can add notes to most items so I ask for the fresh items such as prepared salads with expiry dates as far in the future as possible (after my experience of getting one that was a few days after purchase). It requires more effort but I think it’s worth it. You can order more (to last longer) and shop less.”

But not everyone has found it helps.

“I only want milk supplied with a greater use-by date than a week ahead (to ensure it will be consumed by that date) and have twice (in a row) had that request ignored,” says Peter.

And Robert says, “I’ve given up online shopping as I’ve been delivered short-dated products far too many times – despite requesting the longest available use-by dates with my order.”

Your right to a refund or replacement

It’s an offence for retailers to sell food that’s past its use-by date

It’s an offence for retailers to sell food that’s past its use-by date, according to Australian food regulator FSANZ. However, a food that’s past its best before date can be sold, provided it’s fit for human consumption – it hasn’t deteriorated or perished, for example. But it might not be something you’d choose to buy if you were shopping instore.

So, what are your rights if you receive an out-of-date food product, or if you feel short-changed by the short-dating on a delivered food item?

A Coles spokesperson says: “We offer a full refund or replacement for products that do not meet our customers’ quality expectations.”

Likewise, a Woolworths spokesperson tells us: “If customers have any concerns with the quality of a fresh food product they’ve bought either instore or online, they can return it for a refund and replacement as part of our fresh or free guarantee.”

In practice we found that customers aren’t always opting to ask for a replacement or requesting a refund. The majority of our survey respondents who received foods past their date marking disposed of them (69%) and around three in ten (29%) just went ahead and ate them anyway.

The perceived (or actual) effort required to get the refund or replacement could be a deterrent.

In John’s experience, “Mostly the supermarket refunds without question, but it is still hard when you have to make a special trip to the supermarket to pick up a replacement.”

But three in ten (29%) did pursue an exchange or refund for expired and short-dated foods, and the experience of those who shared details with us was generally positive.

“The refund process was surprisingly simple,” says Scott.

Gary agrees: “For the occasional cases of short-dating (or any quality complaint of any type), it was very easy to lodge a complaint online, nominate the item, and receive a refund for that item.”

“The supermarket that supplied the past use-by date was very apologetic and happy to refund,” says Kim.

Rebecca’s experience was similar. “As frustrating as it was to receive short-dated foods, the supermarket was always easy to communicate with and without question gave a refund for the item(s).”

Some respondents gave us specific examples.

“I received a prompt refund for some chilled fresh chicken that was well and truly spoiled, even though it was within the use-by date,” says Michael.

Adrienne says: “In my case, the cauliflower rice was due to expire on the day of receipt and I complained and got a refund.”

While a positive resolution to a problem is pleasing, it wouldn’t be necessary if customers are delivered fresh, good quality and in-date products in the first place. Our research shows that this isn’t always happening. Supermarkets should take responsibility for sticking to their own guidelines, rather than the onus being on individual shoppers to complain and ask for refunds.

For more information, including how we survey, visit **choice.com.au/foodexpirydates**. ■

THE FOOD ISSUE

PLANT POWER

Why are plant-based meat alternatives booming? **Rachel Clemons** is hungry for answers

Not so long ago, 'plant-based eating' was a novel concept, and meat alternatives in a supermarket were limited to a small selection of Quorn mince or Linda McCartney sausages in the freezer.

Today you can find a 'plant-based' or 'vegan' claim on a dizzying array of food products, from lasagne, lollies and yoghurt to condensed milk, shredded cheese and schnitzels.

We take a look at the growth in the plant-based alternatives market, and what's behind it.

We also look at people's perception of plant-based labels on packaged food, how plant-based alternatives compare with their conventional versions and what to consider when buying packaged foods labelled 'plant-based' or 'vegan'.

A bounty of plant-based alternatives

The number of new plant-based products on supermarket shelves has visibly increased, but the category that has really boomed is plant-based meat alternatives.

Thomas King, CEO of independent think tank Food Frontier, tells CHOICE that its 2020 State of the Industry report shows that Australia's plant-based meat industry grew exponentially from 2019 to 2020, doubling its manufacturing revenue and jobs.

"The number of new products in supermarkets like meat-free burgers, sausages and ready meals, also doubled in that time, with the category seeing 46% sales growth in retail," says King.

Australian supermarkets now offer more than 250 plant-based meat alternative products, "more than half of which are made by Australian companies", he says. So what's behind this growth?

Australian supermarkets now offer more than 250 meat-alternative products

Dietary identities of Australians

Most Australians (79%) consider themselves to be omnivores (eat food of both plant and animal origin), according to a CHOICE survey. A further nine percent consider themselves to be 'flexitarian' (eat a primarily vegetarian diet, but occasionally eat meat or fish) and three percent say they're pescatarian (eat fish, but not meat).

So although just five percent and two percent of Australians identify as vegetarian and vegan, respectively, it's clear there's a trend in this direction.

For many, the transition to a predominantly plant-based diet is fairly recent. Of those who follow a vegan or vegetarian diet, 55% have been doing so for less than five years.

Even many people who aren't giving up meat altogether are ▸

IMAGE: GETTY

cutting down. Last year, the University of Adelaide found that almost one in five Australians were consciously reducing their meat consumption.

And according to a nationally representative survey by market research group Colmar Brunton, health is the number one reason so many Australians are choosing to eat less meat (closely followed by the environment, animal welfare, cost and increasing variety of plant-based options available in a four-way tie).

Are plant-based products healthy?

The wholesome-looking labels of plant-based foods – often in earthy tones of green or brown, sometimes with pictures of leaves – conjure images of goodness. Most of us aren't eating enough vegetables and legumes, so choosing products labelled 'plant-based' or 'vegan' may seem like a sensible option. And our survey found that almost half (46%) of Australians believe packaged foods labelled 'plant-based' are healthy. So are they?

In 2020, Food Frontier carried out a nutritional analysis of conventional processed meats and 95 plant-based meat alternatives.

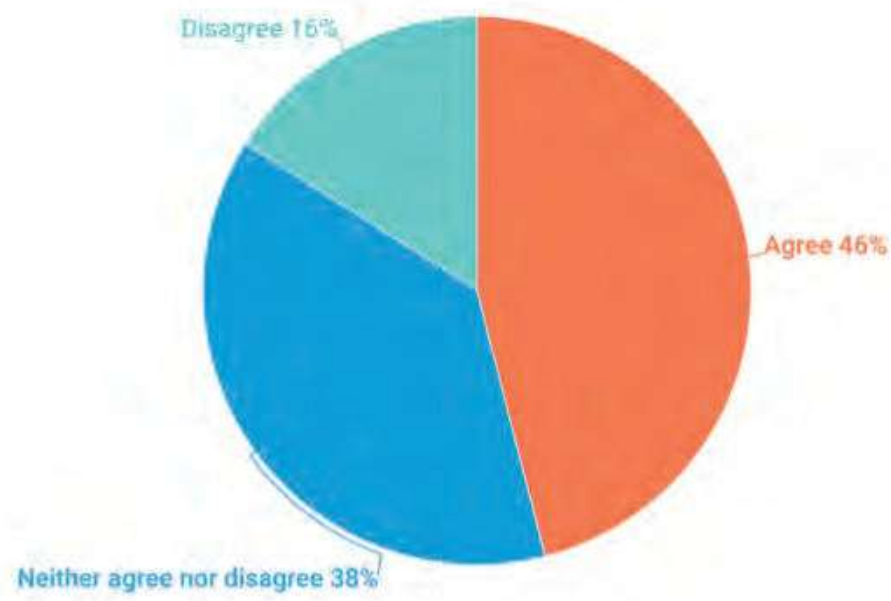
"[This research] showed that, when compared like-for-like with conventional meat sausages, burgers, bacon and poultry (crumbed and un-crumbed), plant-based meat alternative products are on average nutritionally comparable or superior," says King.

"For those Aussies seeking to reduce their meat consumption who still want a burger to throw on the barbecue – plant-based meats can serve as a healthier alternative."

Plant-based alternatives may contain more dietary fibre and lower saturated fat on average than equivalent conventional meat products, and be considered a healthier alternative. But bear in mind that we're talking about sausages, burgers, bacon and schnitzels – meats that global health authorities suggest everyone avoids, even if they don't follow a plant-based diet.

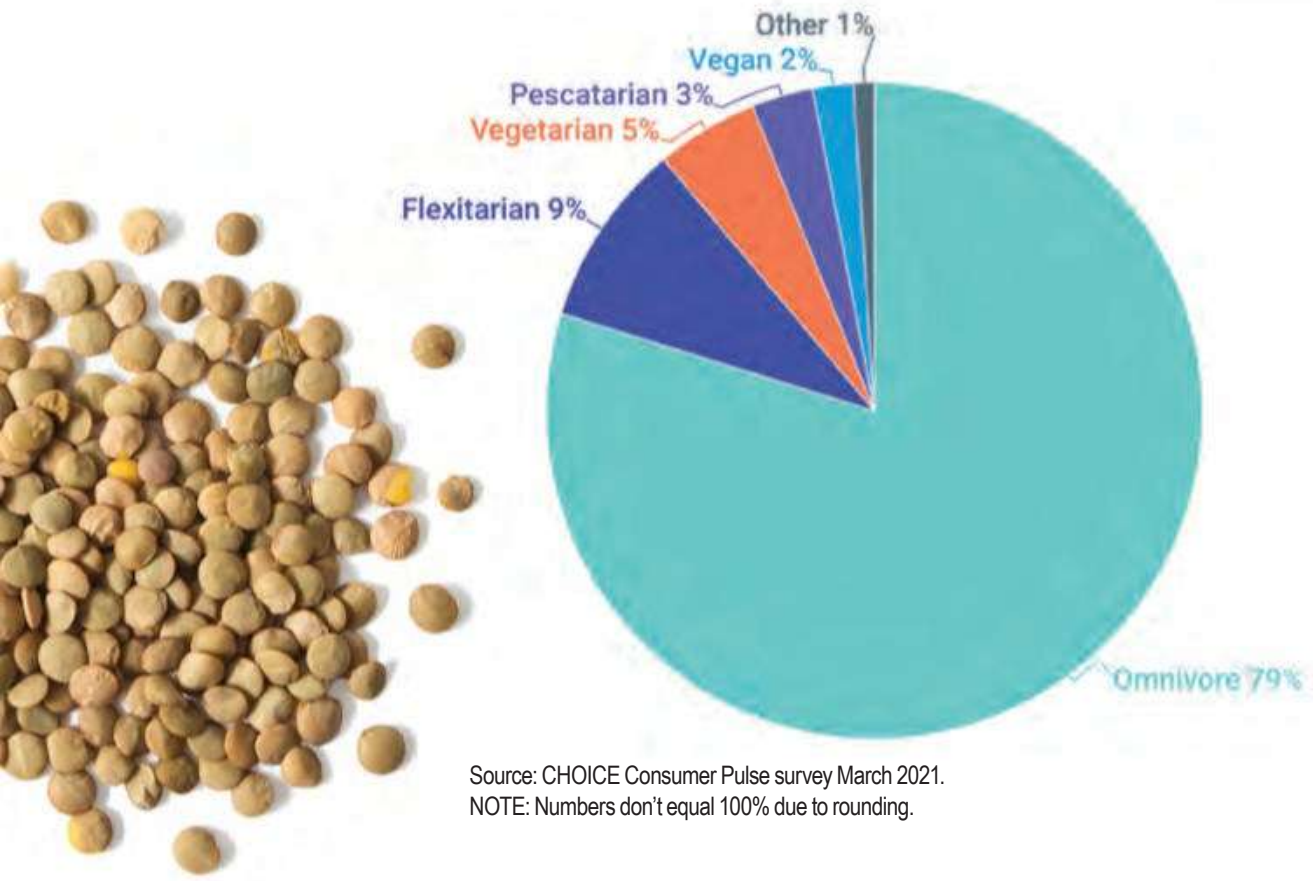
Some would argue that a sausage is still a sausage – a 'sometimes food' – whether it's plant or meat based. And sugary confectionery is never going to be good for you, even if it's labelled 'vegan'.

Percentage of Australians who agree with the statement, 'Packaged foods labelled as plant-based food are healthy'



Source: CHOICE Consumer Pulse survey March 2021

Dietary identities of Australians



Source: CHOICE Consumer Pulse survey March 2021.
NOTE: Numbers don't equal 100% due to rounding.

Why are plant-based foods often more expensive?

Plant-based processed foods are often more expensive than their meat-based alternatives.

One reason is that they may require unique ingredients to create a palatable texture or flavour, and those ingredients may be more expensive than those used in the alternatives. Different processing methods and facilities, lack of economies of scale, and extra supply-chain and distribution costs can also push up costs.

Whether it's for those reasons, or simply opportunistic marketing designed to appeal to plant-based-

conscious consumers wanting to make a quick and easy decision, there's no shortage of examples of 'plant-based' or 'vegan' versions of near-identical foods that have premium price tags.

Plants vs 'plant-based'

Eating more whole foods from plants – think fruit, vegetables, legumes, grains, nuts and seeds – is always going to be a healthier option than including more processed products in your diet, even if they're plant-based.

A key reason dietary guidelines recommend we include meat and certain dairy foods in our diets is because they offer beneficial amounts of nutrients. Meat, for example, gives you protein, iron, zinc, vitamin B12 and essential fatty acids, among other nutrients. And milk, yoghurt and cheese are a good source of many nutrients including calcium, protein, iodine and vitamin D.

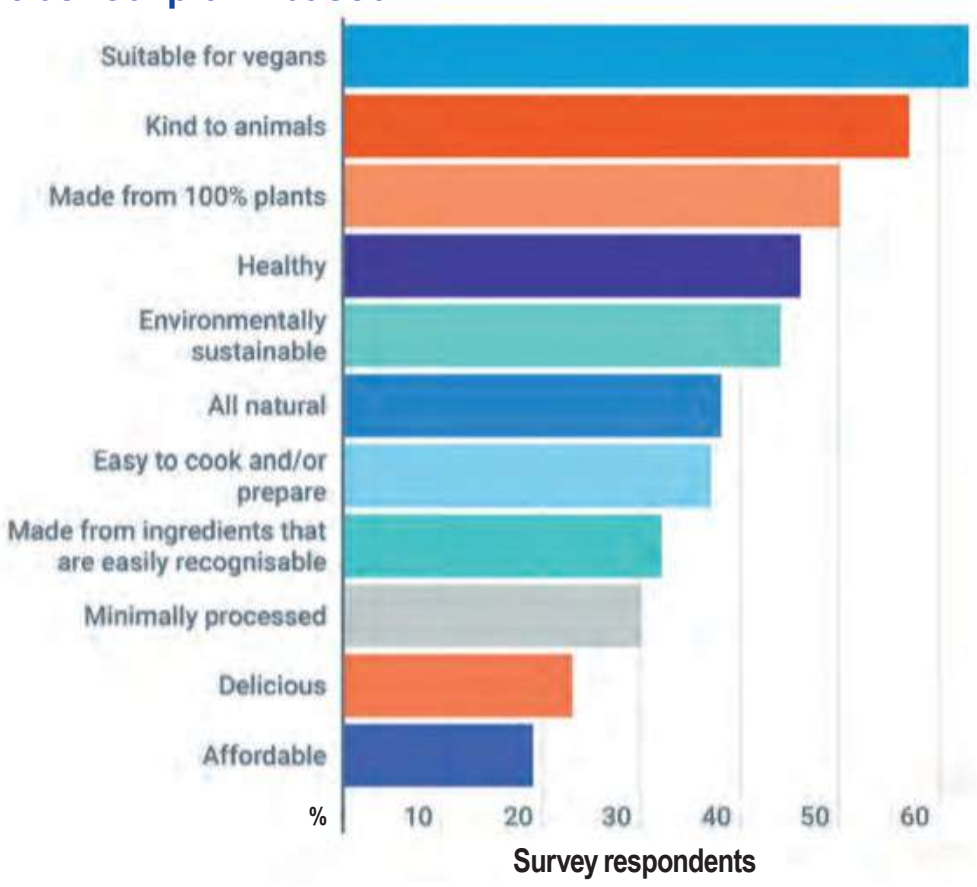
Some of these nutrients can be harder to obtain from some vegetarian or vegan diets, and a bit more planning is required. So if you're replacing these foods entirely with plant-based alternatives, it's worth consulting a health professional such as an accredited practising dietitian to make sure the alternatives you choose are suitable and provide a balanced diet. ■

Key insights about plant-based eating

- Most (79%) Australians are omnivores (eat food of both plant and animal origin).
- Only 2% of Australians are vegan and 5% are vegetarian.
- 18–34 year olds are twice as likely to be vegan than the average Australian.
- 57% of Australians agree that plant-based foods are kind to non-human animals.
- About one in 10 would consider adopting a fully vegan diet in the next 5 years.
- The main barrier to following a fully vegan diet for three in four (77%) Australians is current enjoyment of animal-based products (meat, dairy, eggs).
- About one third of Australians say the cost of vegan food is a barrier to adopting a fully vegan diet in the future.
- Vegans/vegetarians are more likely to agree food labelled 'plant-based' can be described as delicious (59% vs 40% of flexitarians and 16% of omnivores).
- Milk is the animal product for which Australians most commonly use an alternative, with three in 10 people consuming milk alternatives at least once a week.

Source: CHOICE Consumer Pulse survey March 2021

What people think about packaged foods labelled 'plant-based'



Source: CHOICE Consumer Pulse survey March 2021

Our survey

CHOICE surveyed 1096 Australians on a range of topics, including plant-based eating, between 15 and 29 March 2021. The data has been weighted to make sure it is representative of the Australian population according to the 2016 ABS Census data on age, state, sex, household income and education.

IMAGE: GETTY

THE FOOD ISSUE

Cop it sweet

Packaged toddler foods may be convenient for busy parents, but many are full of hidden sugars, says **Rachel Clemons**

When you're time-poor and caring for a toddler, packaged food from the supermarket can be invaluable. Toss a snack from the pantry into your bag and you can keep your toddler content in the car or placate them in the playground. Home late from work? No problem. Just grab a meal from the freezer to heat quickly and serve.

And not only are they incredibly convenient, but they can be healthy too. At least, that's what the labels would have us believe, with their claims of 'locked in goodness', 'no added junk' and 'made with real fruit' alongside wholesome images of children and fresh fruit and veg.

What's in the pack often bears little resemblance to what's promised on the label

But things aren't always as they seem. We reviewed 78 packaged meals and snacks marketed for toddlers and found that:

- more than half contain sugars that are harmful to health
- many are highly processed
- what's in the pack often bears little resemblance to what's promised on the label.

See 'Our analysis' on p35.

Sugars in toddler food

Most parents would tell you that their children are sweet enough. But manufacturers of toddler foods seem to think otherwise.

Of the products we looked at, 58% contain added sugars that are harmful to health. Almost half (45%) could be

classified as high in sugar, with at least 15g of sugar per 100g. And the worst offenders are more than 60% sugar.

TODDLER FOODS WITH MOST SUGAR

- Rafferty's Garden Strawberry Yoghurt Buttons (62.3% sugar)
- Rafferty's Garden Mixed Berry Yoghurt Buttons (62.9%)
- Kiddylicious Crispy Tiddlers Raspberry (63%)
- Kiddylicious Smoothie Melts Strawberry & Banana (67%)
- Kiddylicious Strawberry Fruit Wriggles (68.8%).

There are several reasons why sugary toddler foods are a concern, not least of which is that having too much sugar in your diet can contribute to health problems.

Health risks to children

Jane Martin, executive manager of the Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC), tells us: "Regularly eating sugary foods puts children at risk of tooth decay and unhealthy weight gain. As they grow older this can lead to increased risk of diseases such as type-2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers."

More insidious is that when children regularly consume sugary foods and drinks, their palates and taste buds adjust in response.

"Children can develop a preference for sweet foods which can result in a diet high in sugar and missed opportunities for the child to develop a taste preference for healthier, unsweetened foods," says Martin.

There were almost twice as many sweet products as savoury in the 78 toddler foods we found on supermarket shelves. But avoiding the products with harmful levels of sugar and choosing healthier options is far from straightforward. Obstacles include sneaky marketing and weak sugar labelling requirements.

'Healthy' labels often misleading

More than half (54%) of the toddler products we looked at have images of whole fruit on their packaging, but in many instances the ingredients list tells a different story. Often the fruit ingredient is actually a fruit concentrate, paste or purée – used to sweeten the product – and bears little resemblance to the whole fruit from which it's derived.

"Many snacks marketed for toddlers are sweetened with processed fruit ingredients which are high in sugar," says Martin. "In a lot of cases, it's actually sticky, sugary paste, extracted from fruit. This is done by sieving it, boiling it, and removing all its water, until it's barely more than a pile of sugar.

"Consumption of these products should be limited, but instead manufacturers are trying to dupe families into thinking they're healthy."

"Children can develop a preference for sweet foods"

Fruit or concentrated fruit sugar?

Most products that claim 'made with real fruit' or purport to contain a certain percentage of fruit on the label – 14% of the products we looked at – are referring to a fruit concentrate or purée rather than whole fruit.

But not everyone has the time (or inclination) when shopping to pore over the ingredients lists. And Martin is concerned that these front-of-pack images and claims can be confusing for caregivers.

"These processed food manufacturers are misleading parents into thinking that these products are healthier than they are, when in fact they are often full of sugar and are packed with cheap sweeteners – shaping our children's preferences from a very early age," she says.

Do toddlers need special food?

Alice Pryor, Campaigns Manager for Parents' Voice, is concerned that the availability of these types of products, which are rarely the healthiest choice available, will reinforce the message that toddlers need special food.

"Parents want to give their children the best start to life, and these products lead parents to believe they are healthy ▸

IMAGE: GETTY

Sugar coating

More than 60 different names for 'added sugar'

- Agave nectar/syrup
- Barbados sugar
- Barley malt extract/syrup
- Beet sugar
- Blackstrap molasses
- Brown sugar
- Cane juice/juice crystals
- Cane sugar
- Caramel
- Carob syrup
- Caster sugar
- Coconut sugar
- Coffee sugar crystals
- Confectioner's sugar
- Corn syrup
- Crystalline fructose
- Date sugar/syrup
- Demerara sugar
- Dextrin
- Dextrose
- Florida crystals
- Fructose
- Fruit juice/juice concentrate
- Fruit paste
- Fruit powder
- Fruit puree
- Glucose/glucose syrup
- Golden sugar
- Golden syrup
- Grape sugar/syrup
- High fructose corn syrup (HFCS)
- Honey
- Icing sugar
- Invert sugar
- Jam
- Lactose
- Malt extract/syrup
- Maltodextrin
- Maltose
- Maple syrup
- Molasses
- Muscovado
- Nectar
- Oat syrup
- Palm sugar
- Panela
- Panocha
- Rapadura
- Raw sugar
- Refiner's syrup
- Rice malt extract/syrup
- Sorghum syrup
- Sucanat
- Sucrose
- Sugar
- Syrup
- Treacle
- Turbinado
- Vegetable juice/juice concentrate
- White sugar

and nutritional snacks and meals for their children, when the reality is that many of them are actually laden with hidden salt and sugar," says Pryor.

"The report that 45% of these products are high in sugar is concerning given that most parents of toddlers would struggle to find time in the supermarket to read and compare the small print on the backs of these items."

Added sugars can be disguised by going under more than 60 different names

Snacks for healthy development

Another strategy food manufacturers use to market toddler foods is to appeal to a parents' desire to support the healthy development of their child. This is done at both brand level and product level.

"Our snacking range has been developed to encourage your child to discover new tastes, textures, aromas and shapes," says the label on Cub brand snacks.

Whole Kids assures us it "is committed to making yummy, nourishing food for your family using real ingredients. No artificial stuff. No funny numbers. And no added junk".

Mamia (from Aldi) asserts that its food range "has been lovingly developed for your little one to ensure they receive a varied start to their food adventure" and reminds us that "Exploring new textures, aromas and tastes is a vital part of your child's early development."

And Rafferty's Garden Strawberry Yoghurt Buttons are claimed to be "perfect for little mouths" while Only Organic Yoghurt Rice Cakes are "the perfect size and shape for little hands to hold".

Alternatively, you can simply head to the fruit department and find plenty of in-season fruits that tick all of those boxes.

Highly processed, no substance

Sometimes the problem with packaged toddler foods isn't just about what's in them, but also what's not in them.

Kiddylicious Veggie Straws, for example – which are essentially puffed-up potato starch, with added vegie powders, salt and oil – have minimal added baddies, it's true. But they're so highly processed they offer little in the way of nutritional value – just empty kilojoules.

They're also reminiscent of mainstream snack products such as Burger Rings and Cheetos, a similar look and feel that isn't ideal if it leads to a taste and preference for those types of snack foods.

Not so easy to identify sugar on food labels

At the moment, it's difficult to decipher how much sugar has been added to a food by looking at the label. Added sugars can be disguised by going under more than 60 different names, some of which are perhaps more familiar (cane sugar or treacle, for example) than others (such as maltodextrin, corn syrup or fruit juice concentrate).

As they aren't grouped together in the ingredients list, they're not always easy to identify. And the total sugar listed in the nutrition information panel doesn't differentiate sugars that have been added by the manufacturer from those that are intrinsic to the food or one of its ingredients. This makes added sugars even harder to quantify.

THE LONG FIGHT FOR BETTER SUGAR LABELLING

We have long lobbied for clear and meaningful added sugar labelling on foods, so that consumers can make informed decisions about the products they buy. The OPC is advocating for improvements too, urging food ministers to implement higher standards and make added sugar labelling mandatory.

Crucially, Martin explains, "We want to see added sugars clearly defined to capture all sugars that are harmful to health, including highly processed fruit ingredients like pastes and concentrates which are often in products marketed as healthy, such as toddler foods."

'No substitute for whole fruit'

Pryor would also like to see more truth in labelling. "Fruit concentrates, pastes and purées are added sugar and no substitute for whole fruit," she says.

"Companies should not be associating these products with whole fruits, and should display clearer front-of-pack labelling for busy parents."

Currently there's some regulation around foods for infants, including sodium limits, but not for toddlers, or relating to sugar content.

"Most parents would be surprised to hear that there is no regulation of toddler foods," says Pryor. "Governments should set a better standard and regulate the contents of foods formulated for toddlers."

Martin agrees: "We also want the government to regulate the amount of added sugar that food companies can put in infant and toddler foods to protect the health of our youngest Australians." ▸

IMAGE: GETTY

How to be snack savvy

Nutritious, whole foods that are simple to prepare make the best snacks – fresh fruit pieces, vegie sticks, cheese cubes, plain yoghurt or wholemeal toast fingers, for example.

"When shopping for foods for toddlers, look for the healthy whole foods which tend to be located around the outside of the supermarket," says Martin. "Most processed packaged foods including those for toddlers tend to be in the aisles."

Four top tips

There's no doubting the convenience of a packaged snack. So if you do decide to buy one, follow these tips to make an informed choice:

1. Read the ingredients list first – ingredients are listed in order of greatest to smallest quantities. As a rule of thumb, the shorter the list, the better. Aim for products with a small ingredients list consisting of whole foods and no added sugars and salt.
2. Check for real fruit ingredients, not just fruit concentrates, pastes, purées and powders.
3. Don't be swayed by marketing claims that the snack will "encourage self-feeding" or is "easy to grasp with little fingers". A cucumber stick, a crust of wholemeal bread, a rice cracker or a banana can all do the same job.
4. Consider all packaged snacks to be 'sometimes' foods, not regular staples.

Finally, think twice before heading to the baby and toddler food section of the supermarket. You can often find a healthier – or at least cheaper – snack if you choose from a different aisle. See our examples below.

Snack swaps

Vegie snacks

TODDLER SNACK: Kiddylicious Sour Cream & Chive Flavour Veggie Straws (Price/100g: $12). They may be 'easy to grasp' and in a format that 'encourages self-feeding' but they're still flavoured, puffed-up snacks that offer little nutritional value.

ALTERNATIVE SNACK: Cobs Sour Cream & Chives Corn Puffs (Price/100g: $2.92). Also a flavoured, puffed-up snack, but without the extra plastic and price mark up of a multipack. Why spend more than you need to?

BEST SNACK: Baby Corn spears (Price/100g: $0.24). High in fibre, naturally sweet and just as easy as a 'veggie straw' for toddlers to grasp.

Yoghurt snacks

TODDLER SNACK: Rafferty's Garden Strawberry Yoghurt Buttons (Price/100g: $15.71). These snacks are 97% 'yoghurt', but the second-biggest ingredient is sugar, resulting in a product that's more than 60% sugar overall.

ALTERNATIVE SNACK: Farmers Union Greek Style Yoghurt With A Hint Of Real Strawberry (Price/100g: $1.15). In a squeezy pack that appeals to toddlers, you get the benefit of protein and calcium from yoghurt in this form. It's lower in sugars (just over 10%) but still sweetened (with strawberry purée and reconstituted juice).

BEST SNACK: Farmers Union Greek Style All Natural Yoghurt (Price/100g: $0.55). Made from milk and live cultures, natural yoghurt is a good source of protein and calcium, and the only sugars present are those naturally found in milk. Simply add some chopped fresh fruit if you'd like it sweeter.

Apple snacks

TODDLER SNACK: Kiddylicious Strawberry Fruit Wriggles **(Price/100g: $15).** Fruit Wriggles are 74% apple purée and juice concentrate, and 24% strawberry purée – and almost 70% sugars overall.

ALTERNATIVE SNACK: Angas Park Dried Apples **(Price/100g: $2.20).** Dried apple slices are a fraction of the cost, and you get the benefit of fibre, among other nutrients that are lacking in the Fruit Wriggles.

BEST SNACK: Apples **(Price/100g: $0.39).** A perfectly delicious, nutritious fruit packaged by nature. Cut into wedges or ring slices for little hands.

Grain snacks

TODDLER SNACK: Whole Kids Organic Farm Animal Biscuits **(Price/100g: $3.43).** These are lower in sugar than many commercial biscuits, but they're still 22.7% sugars. The cane sugar and other ingredients are organic, but there's nothing healthy about organic sugar or organic cornflour.

ALTERNATIVE SNACK: Arnott's Shredded Wheatmeal Biscuits **(Price/100g: $0.92).** Arguably less fun than biting the ears off a rabbit or the snout off a pig, but certainly cheaper. These biscuits also have less sugar (16.8%) and higher fibre from their wheatmeal ingredient.

BEST SNACK: Wholemeal toast fingers **(Price/100g: about $0.30–$0.40).** High in fibre, free of added sugar, and tasty. Just add sliced banana for natural sweetness!

Rice snacks

TODDLER SNACK: Little Quacker Rice Biscuits Strawberry Flavour **(Price/100g: $7.50).** Made from organic sugar (and rice), but their 'organic-ness' doesn't mean they're nutritious. Plus you're paying a premium for a product that's 'conveniently wrapped in packs of 2'.

ALTERNATIVE SNACK: Sakata Stars Plain Rice Crackers **(Price/100g: $3.85).** Still in convenient snack packs but about half the price, and without the added sugar.

BEST SNACK: Ceres Organic Brown Rice Crackers **(Price/100g: $2.70).** Brown rice means more fibre, and these crackers don't come with the price hike (or extra packaging waste) associated with individually wrapped servings.

IMAGE: GETTY

Our analysis

In 2019 the Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC) published the results of its analysis of food products marketed for infants (babies under 12 months) and toddlers (aged 12 to 36 months), excluding formula, available from Aldi, Coles and Woolworths. For the current review, CHOICE updated and expanded on the original data to reflect packaged toddler food products available in 2021.

We've focused on products in the baby-food aisle and freezer section (not the snack food or chiller aisles) and labelled specifically as being for children aged 12 months and above. Details we recorded include brand, price, nutrition information, ingredients list, pack claims and pack imagery.

PACKAGED TODDLER FOOD OVERVIEW

- 78 products reviewed, from 15 different brands.
- 73% were snacks (puffs, bars, biscuits, cakes, straws, buttons etc), 17% meals, 10% fruit and veg.
- 63% sweet, 37% savoury.

Our thanks go to the OPC for kindly giving us access to the original dataset. ■

WORTH A FRY

Keen for an air fryer but on a tight budget? These models punch above their price tag, says **Pru Engel**

Air fryers have gained quite the following due to their reputation for being a convenient kitchen helper. They're great for small households, can cook simple (or extravagant) dinners, and are handy for heating leftovers. Some fervent fans even admit to owning two or three, and others claim they now no longer need to use their oven at all.

But with price tags ranging from $599 or more for a top-of-the-line Philips model to less than $60 for a Kmart version, it's worth considering how much you're prepared to pay to buy into the craze.

An air fryer works more like a small fan-forced oven and bakes food

When our expert testers put 21 popular air fryers through their paces in our labs, a few cheaper models got their tick of approval, which we profile on the next page.

What are air fryers, anyway?

Given the name of the appliance, you'd be forgiven for assuming air fryers fry food. But, in fact, an air fryer works more like a small fan-forced oven and bakes food.

"It has a fan and an element and the fan circulates the heat from the element around a small cavity," explains CHOICE kitchen expert Fiona Mair. "The element surrounds the fan positioned at the top of the unit.

"A pull-out drawer with a basket or removable grill rack allows the hot air to flow around the food, which works the same as a fan-forced oven."

Is it a healthier way to enjoy fried food?

Not exactly. It all comes down to what you're cooking in it. You can use your air fryer to cook similar things as you would in a normal oven, such as grilled meats and vegies and homemade chips. But if you're cooking pre-packaged frozen foods that are highly processed, it's not going to be a healthier option.

And although air-fried foods are better than deep-fried foods in that they use much less oil, it's no different from using oil to roast or grill in a conventional oven.

"It's just smart marketing to make people think they can get the same results as deep frying without all the oil used, but this isn't the case," says Fiona. "You need oil to give the flavour and texture to the food to call it fried."

Consider its size

When buying an air fryer, Fiona advises you take note of the internal capacity and bulkiness of the model.

"Air fryers can't cook huge quantities of food at once, but they do come in different sizes, so choose a capacity that's right for your household," she says.

"And they take up quite a lot of bench space. It would be more useful if you could keep it out permanently rather than storing it away in a cupboard, so before buying, ensure it's something that you're going to use regularly."

THREE RECOMMENDED AIR FRYERS FOR LESS THAN $200

78%
EasyCook Connoisseur turbofry oven E777 11L

Ease of use score: **62%**
Cooking performance (crumbed chicken): **90%**

More of a mini benchtop oven than an air fryer, this has a few more cooking options. It impressed our experts with its cooking performance, particularly how well it cooks crumbed chicken, frozen chips and roast chicken on the rotisserie, which comes as an added accessory. It comes with a grilling rack, air fry basket and pizza tray (though its pizza didn't impress). Our experts scored the model down on ease of use, as they found some parts fiddly to use and difficult to clean, plus the lid can become quite hot during cooking.

77%
Healthy Choice Air Fryer AF1300

Ease of use score: **67%**
Cooking performance (crumbed chicken): **90%**

For $20 more than the EasyCook at left, this model (also more of a benchtop oven) rated as well for cooking performance and slightly better for ease of use, with the added features of seven pre-set cooking functions. Fiona notes, "The capacity is claimed to be 13L but the actual usable capacity is much less. The rotating basket can only hold 500g chips and the rotisserie holds only a small 1.2kg chicken." Like the EasyCook, it comes with accessories: a grilling rack, air fry basket, rotisserie and tongs.

75%
Kogan 6.2L Digital Low Fat 1800W Air Fryer

Ease of use score: **63%**
Cooking performance (crumbed chicken): **85%**

The 'Low Fat' in the title is dubious (as Fiona says, food cooked in an air fryer is only as healthy as the food itself), and Kogan has a bit of a sketchy reputation for customer service, but this is one of the cheapest air fryers we recommend. It's advertised as having a capacity of 6.2L, but the basket will handle just 500g chips or 400g crumbed chicken at a time (to ensure it cooks evenly). It rates 'very good' for overall cooking performance and comes with seven pre-set cooking functions, but no accessories.

How we test air fryers

We conduct five cooking tests to assess each air fryer's performance. We give each model a score based on how well they cook frozen crumbed chicken and frozen chips. For those who want to use their fryer beyond frozen foods, we also score based on how well they cook roast pork, marinated chicken wings and freshly cut fries.

We also give each an 'Ease of use' score, taking into account things such as how easy the controls are to use, how bulky the units are and how easy they are to clean. ■

IMAGE: GETTY | WWW.EBAY.COM.AU/ITM/254567383577 | WWW.CATCH.COM.AU/PRODUCT/HEALTHY-CHOICE-13L-DIGITAL-AIR-FRYER-AF1300-5949004/ | / WWW.EASYCOOK.COM.AU/SHOP/E777-TURBO-AIR-FRYER/

Bake ’n’ scrape

Cleaning your cooking appliances will help keep them safe, efficient and looking good, says **Kim Gilmour**

Keeping your cooking appliances clean can be a chore but regular maintenance will work in your favour in the long run. Before cleaning, ensure all appliances have sufficiently cooled down (so they aren’t hot to the touch) and are unplugged (with the cord detached if possible). Our tips are general; consult your manual for specific advice.

Multicookers, slow cookers and rice cookers

1. WIPE DOWN AFTER EACH USE

Your appliance must be cool enough before cleaning, but don’t let the residue dry completely as it’ll get harder to remove later, especially in cracks. So, as soon as you can:

- wipe the exterior of the cooker carefully with a damp, soft cloth or sponge and household dishwashing detergent, then dry with a dry microfibre or soft cloth
- remove and wash any lid gaskets (if possible) in warm soapy water and dry them well. If they’re the kind that are fixed in position, wipe them down with a damp paper towel and let them dry.

2. CLEAN THE POTS

Think twice about cleaning non-stick pots in a dishwasher as the chemicals in the dishwasher detergent may weaken any non-stick coating. Our experts recommend washing by hand, without using abrasive sponges or scourers that could damage the surface.

NEED TO KNOW

- Never use solvents or harsh commercial chemicals on these appliances.
- Common ingredients such as vinegar, baking soda, dishwashing detergent and lemon are usually all you need.

TIP For stubborn residue, try filling the pot up with warm water and keeping it in your cooker on low or ‘keep warm’ mode for a few hours to soften stuck-on food. You can also remove smells by adding a bit of lemon to the water.

If residue is caked on an inner pot, whether its ceramic, metal or non-stick, soak it in warm water and mild detergent for an hour or so, then rinse and dry thoroughly.

3. CHECK THE COOKER BASE

The internal area of the cooker under the pot can become stained if liquid gets burnt on, reducing its effectiveness. If only a small amount of residue is on the base, mix a small amount of paste of baking soda and water, then wipe gently with a paper towel to remove. Never immerse the main unit in water.

Your best bet is to try to avoid this from happening in the first place by not overfilling your pot and ensuring it's completely clean, dry and free from residue before putting it back into the cooker. If spills do occur, wipe them out as soon as the unit has cooled down.

Air fryers

CHOICE home economist Fiona Mair stresses how important it is to wipe any build-up of oil residue or food inside the unit after cooking as it can start to smoke or even catch alight, depending on where the residue is. She also offers the following tips:

- Clean around the fan after every use of your air fryer.
- The basket or drawer can be easily washed in your sink (or dishwasher, if the manufacturer recommends).
- Wipe up inside the unit with a microfibre cloth soaked in warm, soapy water, then dry. If the unit is still a little warm, cleaning is easier (but make sure it's cool enough to touch).
- When cooking high-fat foods like chicken wings or bacon, grease can drip down into the tray, causing mess and smells. Add a small amount of water to the base of the drawer (if the design allows) before cooking to stop the fat from smoking and to help reduce cleaning. Using a toothpick can help with removing residue from the air fryer basket.

Kettles

Descaling your kettle should be a regular task especially if you're in a hard water area – but it's easy to do and you don't need a commercial cleaner. To remove mineral deposits such as iron oxide and calcium carbonate, put one cup of vinegar and a litre of water in the kettle, leave overnight and then rinse clean.

Toasters

Cleaning the exterior of your toaster can be a challenge, particularly if the design has a lot of cracks and crevices. You'll need to consult the manual for specific cleaning advice, as instructions will depend on whether the exterior is chrome, stainless steel or plastic. In most cases, a soft, slightly damp cloth in a mild detergent will work best, then dry with another cloth or a paper towel.

Built-up crumbs are a fire hazard, so regularly remove and clean the crumb tray. If it's not easy to shake clean, you may be able to wash the tray using soapy water so long as it's completely dry before replacing it (consult the manual).

To get rid of crumbs that make their way into the toaster carriage, ensure it's unplugged then gently turn it upside down over a newspaper or bin and shake gently. Don't hit the toaster as this can damage the mechanisms, and never use a tool to try to scrape out any residue.

Food processors

After processing messy food it may seem like a challenge to clean the bowl and blades. But your food processor itself can help you make this job easy. Simply add a drop of detergent and a small amount of warm water, close the lid and turn it on for a few seconds. Then rinse out in your sink, taking care not to cut yourself on the blades as they can be very sharp.

Food processor discs for shredding can be rinsed under hot water with a nylon brush after use to make cleaning easier.

Microwaves

To tackle caked-on food and smells, place a tablespoon or two of vinegar or some slices of lemon in a cup or small bowl of water, and boil it in the microwave.

Once it's boiled, leave the door closed for five minutes to let the steam loosen the residue, then open the door, remove the bowl and wipe the interior using a microfibre or soft cloth. You can also remove the turntable and wipe each side down with a paper towel to let it shine once more. ■

TIP A small amount of vanilla extract mixed with warm water then sprayed on a cloth before wiping the interior is a good way to remove smells from your microwave.

IMAGE: GETTY

A week eating Lite n' Easy

Marianna Longmire road-tests the meal plan for food, portion sizes, convenience and packaging

When you're busy with work, parenting and general home life, it's easy to swap balanced meals for takeaways, or turn the occasional snack into an everyday treat.

I wasn't looking to lose weight, but I knew I needed a bit of a reset. I was drawn to the TV advertisements for Lite n' Easy and the convenience of prepared calorie-controlled meals. So, I became one of the thousands of people around Australia using the service.

The experience I had may not be the same as the next person's, and I was only on it for a week, but if you're contemplating using Lite n' Easy, here's an insight into what to expect.

Getting started

Lite n' Easy have a selection of plans to choose from including Jump Start (a two-week program to kickstart weight loss) and various 1200, 1500 and 1800 calorie plans.

I entered my details into their website tool – gender, age, weight, height, exercise routine, and whether my goal was weight loss or convenience (I chose convenience).

I was recommended a seven-day, 1800-calorie plan. That's roughly 7530kJ, for those who prefer to think in metric measurements. (The average Australian adult consumes about 8700kJ a day.) I liked that there were no joining fees and that you only pay for what you want – you don't have to agree to regular weekly or fortnightly orders. So I set up an account and made note of the delivery day for my area.

Placing the order

Having selected my plan, I could either choose the preset 'most popular' options, or my own. There were two choices to pick from each day for breakfast, three for lunch, and more than 50 different options for dinner.

I was generally pleased with the choices. For breakfast I steered towards meals with eggs as I prefer those over toast or muesli. I chose lunches based on what I fancied, and for dinners I chose a mix of fresh and frozen – including the southern chicken with sweet potato wedges I'd seen on their latest TV ads.

Dietary requirements and food allergies

Lite n' Easy offers a full vegetarian menu as well as some gluten and

A typical 1800-calorie day on Lite n' Easy: breakfast, lunch and dinner.

dairy-free options, but they also make it clear that their meals are "not suitable for those with coeliac disease or food allergies".

However, the website provides a detailed list of ingredients for each meal, along with allergen details for each food, so depending on your requirements you may still find plenty of options to choose from.

Delivery

There's no set time frame for deliveries (their website says day orders should arrive no later than 5pm). My order arrived at about 8am when I was in the middle of getting my son and myself ready for the day, so I left the two large polystyrene eskies in the kitchen and unpacked them two hours later. I was pleased to find the contents were still perfectly chilled, in part due to the block of dry ice wrapped in plastic at the bottom. You need to be extra careful when removing your items as dry ice can burn your skin. The packaging has several warning labels cautioning 'do not touch' and 'leave dry ice in esky to dissolve'.

They make it clear that their meals are not suitable for people with coeliac disease or food allergies

The bags are clearly marked with the day (one to seven), meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner or snack) and where you should store the food (fridge or freezer).

I hadn't considered the quantity of food and my fridge was already heaving from a recent grocery shop. It took a bit of reorganising, but I managed to squeeze everything in. It meant I'd have to spend some time each day digging around to find what I needed from the freezer, but I do that most nights anyway.

Packaging

Each day I found that there was a certain amount of leftover packaging, and for some meals it was quite substantial.

According to Lite n' Easy, all their dinner trays, plastic bowls and other hard plastics can be recycled kerbside. They'll also collect your clean plastic shopping and day bags to be recycled (or you can REDcycle them yourself), and collect your esky to be reused (if it's in good condition) or recycled.

Lite n' Easy and food allergies: 'It took me a while to work out what I could and couldn't eat'

In 2016, CHOICE food editor Rachel Clemons spent a week following a 1200-calorie plan with Lite n' Easy.

"Placing my order was a little complicated as I have a few food allergies. But I figured their comprehensive list of ingredients and allergens for each meal would help," says Rachel.

"It took me a while to work out what I could and couldn't eat. I had to check the ingredients lists for each type of bread, cereal, salad dressing, cracker and cake. This was rather arduous, although I imagine it would get easier once you became familiar with all the options.

"I was pleasantly surprised to find I was able to select seven breakfasts and lunches from the menu that catered to my allergies, and there was only one snack that I wouldn't be able to eat. I'm not sure if I'd have the same experience each week, as you can't go off-menu and request the same snack every day, for example.

"For the dinners, I selected seven meals from a list of about 50 options. I had to check the ingredients lists for these too, but it was a straightforward process."

IMAGE: GETTY/LITENEASY.COM.AU

IMAGE: GETTY

A selection of Lite n' Easy meals.

Breakfast, lunch and snacks

The breakfast options I'd chosen weren't dissimilar to what I'd normally eat – avocado on toast, poached eggs or an omelette – and there was just enough variety. Four of the five breakfasts also included a serve of cereal, but as someone who doesn't enjoy cereal I would have preferred a larger portion of the main meal.

Lunches were more of a revelation. I'd fallen into a rut of having dinner-sized leftovers, takeaway ramen or larger-than-life sandwiches. So, when I saw the portion size of my lunches I feared some hunger pangs. But my meals – which included a vegie pizza, wraps, a chicken burger and even a curry – were all filling. Each day there was also a small snack, such as choc and nut mix, vanilla yoghurt with yoghurt sprinkles and an apple crumble, and two serves of fruit – at least one fresh item such as an apple or mandarin, and a packaged fruit cup.

I also had the option to pick from a selection of extra snacks at any point – such as an English fruit muffin or cheese and crackers. But I never felt the need to. Most options had some form of bread – always multigrain or full of seeds, which I enjoyed.

The thing that struck me was the portion sizes. The bread rolls for lunch are of diminutive 'dinner roll' proportions, and most of the snacks were around 25g, much smaller than I'd serve myself. Regardless, each day I felt pretty satisfied.

Another thing was the quantity of fresh produce. There was a decent variety with roasted pumpkin, spinach, tomato and salad leaves on offer the first two days – my first two lunches were a vegie pizza and a chargrilled chicken burger and salad, for example. But the rest of the week was more limited – mostly tomato, with a serving of spinach or sliced cucumber.

Dinner

I was thrilled to be able to grab something from the fridge or freezer for myself (yes, my family had to fend for themselves for the week), pleasantly surprised by how substantial the portion sizes seemed, and comfortably full after each meal.

The dinners were a mix of fresh and frozen and though I didn't have particularly high hopes, they were all meals I'd order and eat again. The vegetables in the two fresh dinners were plentiful, vibrant in colour and still crisp after microwaving.

But by the end of the week I missed cooking what I wanted, and family mealtimes felt a bit off when we weren't eating the same dinner.

Lack of flexibility

I never felt hungry, but there were days when I craved something off-menu, or a glass of wine after a long day. I struggled with the lack of flexibility while sticking to the breakfast, lunch and dinner calorie plan. But it was only for a week, so I was able to stick it out without cheating – and in the weeks since I've noticed I don't treat myself as much as I used to.

Family mealtimes felt a bit off when we weren't eating the same dinners

How convenient is Lite n' Easy?

There's no denying that Lite n' Easy is incredibly convenient. For a whole week I didn't have to meal-plan, shop, cook or even think about food for myself. I just had to eat. It's this convenience I was most looking forward to.

But it wasn't something I could realistically benefit from in the long term. I couldn't make my partner and young son fend for themselves forever – not to mention the enjoyment I get from trying out new recipes and cooking a meal we can all share.

Would I recommend Lite n' Easy?

Overall, yes, especially if you want the convenience of not having to think about your meals, or you want to stick to a calorie plan and reset your ideas around portion sizes.

The fact that you're not locked into regular orders is appealing. I can see myself ordering from Lite n' Easy again – most likely their fresh or frozen dinners rather than a weekly meal plan. And in relation to the amount of food I serve up for myself I've learnt how much – or indeed little – I need to feel satisfied. So for that, it was worth it. ■

IMAGE: GETTY/LITENEASY.COM.AU

IMAGE: GETTY

A material issue

When it comes to textile waste, Australia is one of the world's worst offenders. **Andy Kollmorgen** looks at the most recent initiatives to reverse the cycle

NEED TO KNOW

- Every year, Australians buy an average of 27kg of new clothes and throw 23kg away.
- Australia's yearly consumption of textiles is second only to that of the US.
- We talk to experts about the ways consumers can help reduce textile waste.

Clothes are big business in Australia, and we buy a lot of them. We also throw a lot of them away. According to the federal Minister for the Environment Sussan Ley, our yearly consumption of textiles is second only to that of the US.

The numbers tell the story. Every year, Australians buy an average of 27kg of new clothes and purge our wardrobes of 23kg. In 2018–19, Australia generated 780,000 tonnes of textile waste, only seven percent of which was recycled (the rest went to landfill).

In 2018–19 Australia generated 780,000 tonnes of textile waste, only 7% of which was recycled

Waking up to the crisis

What we do with our old clothes is causing some pretty big problems. As Minister Ley recently put it, "we want to keep clothing out of landfill, where it can take hundreds of years to break down, releasing harmful carbon emissions along the way".

Australia's Assistant Minister for Waste Reduction and Environmental Management Trevor Evans points out that "Australians discard close to 800,000 tonnes of clothing and textiles each year, a rate of 15 tonnes every 10 minutes".

Big business

The government is waking up to the textile waste crisis, but the clothing industry appears to be woven into the fabric of our economy.

A report by the Australian Fashion Council (AFC) that came out a few days after Ley's remarks sought to remind the public of the industry's contributions. The report claims the local fashion and textiles industry generates more than $27.2 billion for the Australian economy and employs 489,000 people, more than either mining or utilities.

Amid the competing priorities of selling clothes and protecting the planet, are we making progress toward reducing textile waste?

Reforming our throwaway fashion culture

In recent months there have been signs that governments and the textile industry are waking up to the problem.

The ministers unveiled the stark statistics at the first ever National ▸

Roundtable on Clothing Textile Waste in late May – an event billed as bringing together a wide range of stakeholders, including retailers, reuse charities and waste-management firms, to talk about "Australia's throwaway fashion culture".

NGOs say they're also working with industry to reduce cast-off clothing.

'COORDINATED ACTION'

The CEO of Charitable Recycling Australia, Omer Soker, tells CHOICE the organisation is part of a clothing "dream team" that's pushing for a product stewardship scheme.

That effort is being led by the AFC and includes UK-based WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme), the National Retail Association, the Waste Management and Resource Recovery Association, Sustainable Resource Use and "dozens of other stakeholders committed to coordinated action on clothing", Soker says.

Charitable Recycling Australia envisions a 'circular economy' of textiles in which nothing ends up in landfill

Charitable Recycling Australia, which works with a wide range of charitable organisations including the Salvation Army (Salvos) and the St. Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies), envisions a 'circular economy' of textiles in which nothing ends up in landfill.

And there are examples of industry moving in the right direction. According to the market-leading Swedish multinational clothing retailer H&M Group, 5.8% of its commercial goods were made from recycled materials in 2020, up from 0.62% in 2017. (The company says it's aiming for 30% by 2025.)

Keeping textiles in circulation

In late July this year, Monash University's Sustainable Development Institute released a guide tracking the life cycle of a T-shirt in an effort to help both consumers and clothes makers better understand what creates textile waste – and how to reduce it.

Victoria's Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio spoke at the guide's launch, saying that "it's time for all of us to reconsider our relationship with clothing".

She went on: "Textiles are too valuable to be worn once or twice and then discarded. Just like glass, paper and plastic, we need to establish a more sustainable system for textiles that keeps items in circulation for as long as possible."

Australia playing catch-up

But one long-time industry insider, Adrian Jones, says Australia has historically lagged behind some other countries in both recognising and dealing with the textile waste problem.

Jones is a co-founder of BlockTexx, a Sydney firm that specialises in "textile recovery technology". He's held executive roles at major retailers in the UK and Australia, and is a former CEO of APG, maker of the brands Sportscraft and Saba.

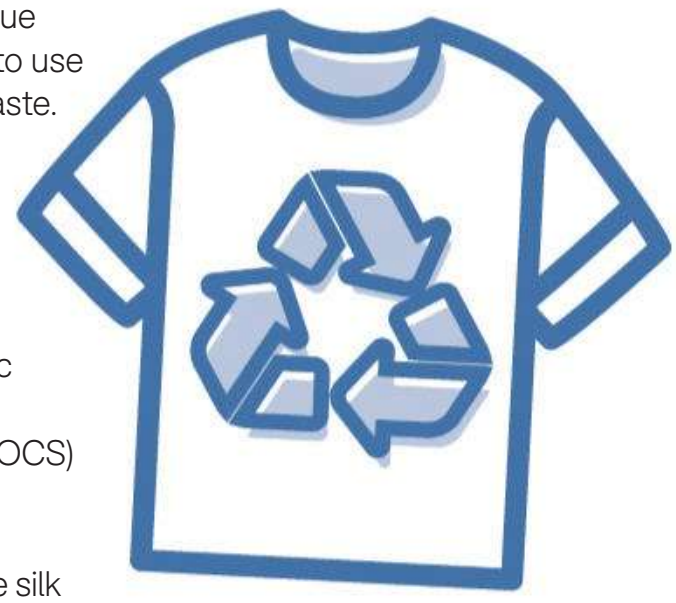
"Textiles until very recently weren't even recognised as a waste stream by local or federal governments," Jones says. "People would concentrate on the traditional waste streams of paper, glass and plastic bottles without understanding that 70% of the world's textiles contain exactly the same chemicals."

AWARENESS GROWING

Although industry groups such as the AFC tend to emphasise jobs and dollars and downplay the waste problem, "I think the consumer is much smarter than that, and far more aware and willing to have a discourse around environmental damage," Jones says. "The industry is more than aware that for a long time it's had a massive impact on the environment and produces significant amounts of waste."

Making a sustainable T-shirt

Some environmentalists argue that the onus is on industry to use materials that create less waste. Researchers from Monash University's Sustainable Development Institute recommend the following:



- Certified organic cotton – preferably Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) or Organic Cotton Standard (OCS)
- Wool – Responsible Wool Standard (RWS) certified
- Silk – organic and/or peace silk
- Linen
- Hemp
- Regenerated cellulosics
- Single fibre – mono material
- 100% recycled polyester – preferably certified recycled in accordance with the Global Recycled Standard
- Recycled cotton
- Lyocell fibres made with REFIBRA technology in different blends.

Not surprisingly, the rapid rise of fast fashion from the likes of H&M and Uniqlo has contributed dramatically to the waste problem.

"Over the last 10 years they've seen increases in their volumes of sales five or six times the growth of population [in their markets]," Jones says. "The growth of fast fashion has been a huge driver of textile waste."

Consumers in the driver's seat

But however grave the problem, the experts we spoke to are closely aligned on one point: consumers have the power to drive change.

Aleasha McCallion, one of the researchers at Monash University's Sustainable Development Institute, cites food as an example. McCallion points out that growing consumer demand to know where our food comes from and what's in it led to the organic food movement and wholesale change across the industry. Now that's happening with clothing, McCallion says.

Experts agree that change doesn't necessarily mean avoiding $5 shirts at Kmart and Big W. Fast fashion has certainly accelerated the waste issue, they say, but the aim should be to improve practices at that end of the market too, not abolish it. (The experts also point out that Kmart and other discount retailers do at least have some sustainability programs in place.)

"I think we need to be very careful in the environmental movement and the sustainability movement, particularly in the textile space, that we don't try to shame people into better habits," says Adrian Jones from BlockTexx. "People say you should buy higher value clothing and you should wear it for longer. I totally agree with that, but not everybody can afford to pay $180 for a plaid shirt."

Repair more, buy less

As with environmental issues in general, small actions by many can make a big difference overall.

"The best form of recycling is reuse or repair, without the shadow of a doubt," says Jones. "Buy the clothes you want and the clothes you can afford, but have access through those brands to the right to repair."

People should also try to buy less, says Jones. "If everybody in the country were to buy one less item of clothing every six months, that's many millions of garments that wouldn't be purchased every year and end up in landfill," he says. "Everybody's wardrobe can bear two less items." ■

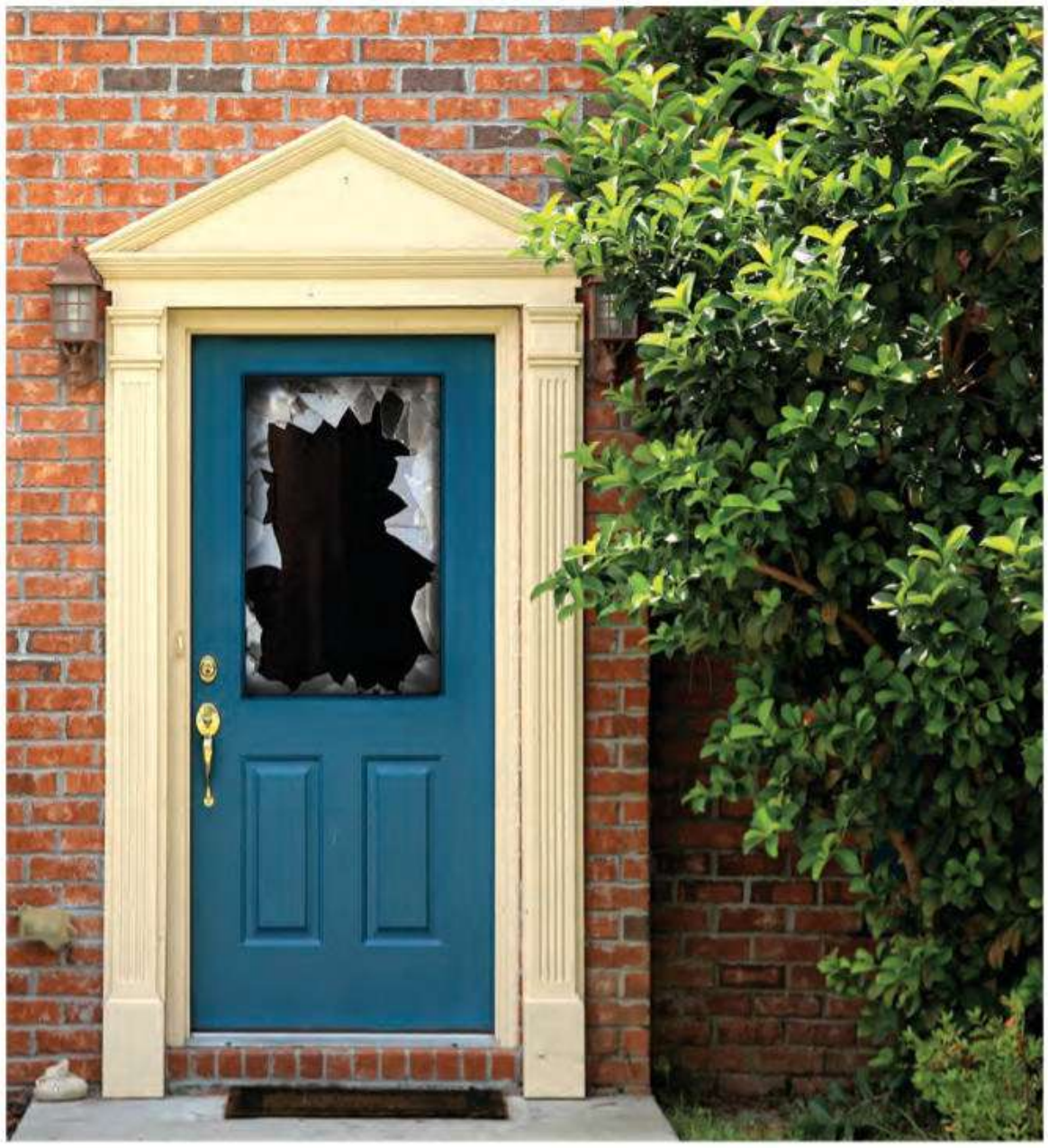
Op shop clothes test: Would you give them to a friend?

Federal Minister for the Environment Sussan Ley recently raised the issue of charities such as Vinnies and the Salvos becoming dumping grounds for unwanted clothes. She says they "are not the place to send our tatty, pre-loved clothes that are barely hanging by a thread, and no amount of 'wishcycling' will change that".

CEO of Charitable Recycling Australia Omer Soker agrees. "Charities can only use quality donations that are not torn, broken or stained," he says. "The best way to identify whether an item is donatable is – if you wouldn't give it to a friend, please don't give it to charity."

Soker also stresses that donatable clothes should be dropped off in the shop or placed securely in a charity bin – not left on the ground around it.

IMAGES: GETTY



The claim game

Renters are being chased by insurers over accidental damage. They deserve protection, says **Jarni Blakkarly**

When Rosa (not her real name) was locked out on her balcony in July last year, she had no idea that almost a year later an insurance company would be pursuing her for thousands of dollars in damages.

Unbeknown to her, the outside door latch on her rented apartment in Melbourne was faulty and when she went out onto the balcony she found herself locked out.

Luckily, she had her phone on her and was able to call for help. "If I didn't have my phone on me I could have been stuck out there and got hypothermia," she tells CHOICE.

'It wasn't my fault'

Eventually the fire brigade had to break down her door to get her out, damaging the door in the process. But the real shock came when a debt collection agency acting on behalf of Chubb Insurance (her landlord's insurance provider) told her she had to pay $3600 for the damage.

"I wasn't expecting it, the degree of their arrogance is just crazy," she says. "It was an accident and it wasn't my fault."

She says the stress of being pursued for thousands of dollars took its toll on her mental health.

"It has added lots of stress, it adds anxiety, I would get panic attacks because of it," she says. "The damage it can do to people and their mental health is immense. To do something so unjust to people is just disgusting."

Far from uncommon

Rosa sought legal advice from Melbourne community legal centre WEstjustice, which gave her information that she sent back to the debt collection agency explaining that she probably wasn't liable. The case was dropped and the recovery action ceased.

But renters being pursued over accidental damage to a rental property is far from uncommon.

Matthew Martin, legal director of WEstjustice's economic justice program, says he's seen about 10 similar cases in the past year.

"That's just through our clinic alone, which only services the western suburbs of Melbourne," he says. "I can only imagine the number of renters it would be affecting nationally, it must be huge."

The stress of being pursued for thousands of dollars took its toll on Rosa's mental health

Dubious claims?

He says Rosa's case, and the fact that it was dropped so quickly when she pushed back, shows how dubious many of these types of insurance claims are.

"These claims are either not investigated at all or not investigated properly, and claims that are made without proper links to the renter being the cause of the damage, are an indication that most of these claims are flimsy," he says.

"When you start to burrow down into the laws of negligence – certainly in all the cases we have seen – the damage is not caused by the renter at all, or is accidental damage, or certainly damage that is not intentional, or malicious, or reckless," he adds.

Renters unaware of their rights

Chubb Insurance tells CHOICE that it doesn't comment on individual cases but maintains that recovering claims helps keep premiums low for customers.

"Recovering costs from at-fault parties keeps claim costs down and is a mechanism used to keep premiums at reasonable levels for our customers," a Chubb spokesperson tells us. "Feedback on our recovery process is welcomed and reviewed in accordance with our policies."

But Martin says the issue highlights that insurers are hoping renters won't research their rights in cases like these and will just pay up, despite potentially not being liable. "There is stress and a mental health impact when renters receive a demand like this," says Martin. "Sometimes it's for hundreds of thousands of dollars without the insurer providing any basis for the claim."

Insurers are hoping renters won't research their rights and just pay up

In Martin's view, most renters aren't aware of their rights and wouldn't push back against insurance claims when the damage was accidental.

"I can only imagine most renters would have no idea what is going on in a situation like this or be aware of their rights in the situation," he says.

'Trying to rob me'

Javier (not his real name) got a letter earlier this year from a solicitor. It said he owed QBE Insurance more than $180,000 due to an accident at a property he rented almost four years earlier. He couldn't believe it.

IMAGE: GETTY

"I was shocked, I felt horrible," he tells CHOICE. "My wife was pregnant and I was on JobKeeper at the time. We're in lockdown, having a baby, and you get a letter saying you owe over $180,000? I went crazy."

The rental property Jose occupied was damaged in 2017 after an accidental fire involving a faulty barbecue.

He says he and his wife, both migrants from Brazil, were planning on buying a property for their new family, but have now had to put those plans on hold as QBE pursued them for the damage.

"I felt like they were trying to rob me, I felt like it was really dodgy," he says. "Something that happened four years ago and suddenly you get a letter saying you owe over $180,000 to a company you have never heard of before."

QBE (partially) responds

QBE Insurance did not respond to questions about how often or in how many cases they pursue renters over accidental damage.

"QBE works within the regulatory framework set out for recoveries across the industry, which are aligned with the General Insurance Code of Practice including considerations surrounding financial hardship," a spokesperson says.

Several days after CHOICE made media inquiries to QBE in mid-July, Javier's lawyers were told that the recovery action against him would be ceased and he was no longer being pursued for more than $180,000.

'Abuse of power'

Erin Turner, director of campaigns and communications at CHOICE, says renters shouldn't be pursued by the landlord's insurance company,

especially if it's happening years after an accident took place.

"Landlord insurance provides additional financial security for landlords by covering loss or damage to a rental property," she says. "It should not result in additional financial risks to renters.

Insurance companies are using legal letters to get people to hand over money they're very unlikely to owe

"Insurers pursuing renters for damages looks like a case of abuse of power – these companies are using legal letters to get people to hand over money that they are very unlikely to owe."

Due diligence

She adds that companies need to do better due diligence about renters' liability before pursuing them.

"Insurance companies have significantly more resources and knowledge about the law than people who rent," she says. "Insurers are taking advantage of people when they try to recoup costs without doing the most basic due diligence to see if the debt is legitimate.

"Insurers are causing significant stress and harm to people in the interests of their bottom line."

But the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA), the industry lobby group, tells CHOICE that recoveries put downward pressure on the cost of insurance for everyone.

"The Insurance Council of Australia notes that recoveries play a role in placing downwards pressure on premiums," a spokesperson says. "The ICA has recently launched a new Code which sets out clear obligations in relation to financial hardship.

"The ICA engages with consumer representatives through its Consumer Advisory Committee, including on areas relevant to landlord insurance.

"We would welcome further engagement to explore the issues raised through this forum."

Australia needs 'much clearer rules'

CHOICE's Erin Turner says, "We need much clearer rules about the limits of insurers to pursue debt from people who rent.

"The New Zealand laws are much stronger than what we currently have in Australia.

"Australian insurers could also immediately put in place policies and practices that stop harm to people who rent."

Martin recommends that any renter being asked to pay for accidental damage by an insurance company contact Legal Aid in their state or a community legal centre for assistance. ■

How New Zealand does it differently

WEstjustice's Matthew Martin points approvingly to the laws in New Zealand, which give clarity and certainty that renters can't be held liable for damage unless it was intentional.

"The law is very clear [in New Zealand] that if the damage is accidental or unintentional, tenants are not liable," he says. "They are treated as third-party beneficiaries under the landlord policy in this situation, and they wouldn't be pursued.

"I think the insurance industry and the laws in Australia have a bit of catch-up to do to adequately protect tenants."

Investigative journalists Jarni Blakkarly (L) and Andy Kollmorgen (R), with editorial director Margaret Rafferty.

We're dedicated to exposing shonky industry tactics, holding culprits to account, and bringing about legislative change.

See what we're doing to support a fairer deal for all Australian consumers.

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CHOICE

THE FOOD ISSUE

No-fuss dinners

Meal delivery services can take the stress out of mealtimes. **Rebecca Ciaramidaro** looks at what's on the menu

Are you looking for inspiration when it comes to dinnertime? Need a break from constantly thinking about what to cook? Or do you want to minimise your food waste? Meal delivery services are marketed as offering an alternative, bringing new variety to your meals and making mealtimes less stressful.

Prepared meals or food boxes?

There are two main services. The first gives you fully prepared meals – all you need to do is 'heat and eat'. These tend to be aimed at singles or couples, and those for whom portion control is a priority.

The second gives you food boxes containing recipes and the precise ingredients you need to create the meals at home. These are often aimed more at families, but if you have a young family, you'll need to consider whether they're right for you. For instance, some CHOICE parents have found that the meals don't always suit their children's palates. They then have to make their children separate dinners, which doubles the work and stress, and defeats the point of getting food boxes in the first place!

Meal delivery services are marketed as making mealtimes less stressful

How we test meal services

Our home economist Fiona Mair rates the performance of food box and prepared meal delivery services by assessing their:

- presentation on arrival
- ease of following the recipes
- freshness of ingredients
- recipe/heating time accuracy.

Our ordering and delivery score is determined by assessing the ease of subscribing and unsubscribing, ease of ordering, whether the service was delivered on time, order accuracy and safe temperature on arrival.

Importance of temperature

It's vital that cold food is stored below 5°C, so Fiona also checks that the food was chilled enough on arrival. She also follows the heating instructions and checks if the meals are adequately heated (above 60°C).

Food and packaging waste

Food waste is a major problem in Australia – every year we waste about 7.3 million tonnes of food, which amounts to about 300kg per person. So, in terms of food waste, how do meal delivery services compare with shopping at the supermarket?

NEED TO KNOW

- Meal delivery services can offer a welcome respite from constantly having to plan meals.
- For safety reasons, it's important to make sure delivered meals are kept at the right temperatures.
- These services can help cut down on food waste, but they do come with lots of packaging.

RECOMMENDED FOOD BOXES

87%
HelloFresh

Average cost for 4 people (3 meals per week): $119.90
Plus shipping cost: $9.99
Delivery areas: ACT, NSW, Qld, NT, SA, Vic, WA
HelloFresh offers various meal plans and an associated app, which is easy to use. Ingredients are delivered in colour-coded bags that match the recipes, and the recipe cards also detail the pantry staples you'll need. The recipe card doesn't give information on allergens or nutrition for each serving. There may be an extra delivery fee for some postcodes, on top of the standard shipping cost.

86%
Marley Spoon

Average cost for 4 people (3 meals per week): $119.40
Plus shipping cost: $9.99
Delivery areas: ACT, NSW, Qld, NT, SA, Tas, Vic
Marley Spoon has 27 meals to choose from each week, plus an app. The recipe cards say which ingredients you'll need (put in separate paper bags) from the box and what pantry staples you'll need, as well as the nutrition per serving. The recipe card highlights common allergens and a 'Packed in Australia' grading system shows the percentage of Aussie ingredients.

85%
Dinnerly

Average cost for 4 people (3 meals per week): $75
Plus shipping cost: $9.99
Delivery areas: ACT, NSW, Qld NT, SA, Tas, Vic
Dinnerly gives you simple recipes and 24 meals to choose from every week, but your pantry staples will need to be pretty well stocked. The provided ingredients aren't separated for each recipe, so you'll need to sort them yourself. And recipe cards aren't included, so you'll have to view the recipe online or print it out. You can also manage your account with the Dinnerly app.

They do help minimise food waste by supplying either the prepared meal, or the exact quantities of ingredients for each recipe in the box. This means you're less likely to waste ingredients you wouldn't use very often (even though you'll still need plenty of pantry staples at the ready). So no more half-plucked bunches of coriander or uneaten leftovers that end up in the compost or bin.

The not-so-good news is that these services usually come with lots of packaging: the big cardboard box, the gel packs to keep the contents cool, plus separate bags for each of the ingredients.

That said, most of it is recyclable and the gel packs are generally reusable, although there are only so many you can accumulate before you'll probably need to start chucking them in the bin.

IMAGES: GETTY

RECOMMENDED PREPARED MEAL SERVICES

86%
Dinner Ladies

Average cost for 4 people (3 meals per week): $90
Plus shipping cost: Varies depending on location, check the website
Delivery areas: ACT, NSW, Vic

Dinner Ladies offers frozen meals to cook at home, including meals for families with children and toddlers. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, desserts, sides, snacks and even weight-loss meals are all on offer. Some meals come fully prepared and just need warming. Others require a small amount of preparation, so you may need some pantry staples such as pasta, rice, vegetables and eggs. Meals are delicious, generous, look presentable, and the service and delivery are very good. Instructions on heating and cooking are very good, too. Some meals will need to be defrosted before cooking, and even then some can take up to 40 minutes to get on the table. Dinner Ladies is cheaper per person then the other prepared services we looked at, although delivery fees vary depending on where you are. Orders usually require about a week's notice, and you'll need to choose a delivery time.

85%
THR1VE

Average cost for 4 people (3 meals per week): $155.40
Plus shipping cost: Free
Delivery areas: ACT, NSW, Qld, Vic

THR1VE offers individual meals only – no family meal options – for which you can choose a weekly or fortnightly subscription, which includes free delivery. We found the meals to be delicious, fresh and well presented. There's good variety on offer: you can choose from breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks and desserts, as well as keto-friendly (low carb, high fat) meals and weight-loss options. Some meals can be frozen, packaging is 100% recyclable and the heating instructions are very good. National Disability Insurance Scheme meal plans are available, too.

You're less likely to waste ingredients you wouldn't use very often

		COSTS			PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS	
Recommended		Price ($)	Average cost per person per meal ($)	Average cost for 4 people (3 meals per week) ($)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Ease of ordering and delivery score (%)	Performance score (%)	Order accuracy score (%)	Safe temperature on delivery score (%)	Freshness score (%)	Ease of recipe score (%)	Choice of meals each week	Claimed average meal preparation times (min)
FOOD BOX SERVICES													
✓	HelloFresh	66	11.00	119.90	87	94	84	100	100	70	85	26 regular 5 premium	30–45
✓	Marley Spoon	69	11.50	119.40	86	94	83	100	100	75	80	27	30
✓	Dinnerly	43	7.30	75.00	85	94	81	100	100	80	75	24	30
	EveryPlate	39	6.50	65.90	84	90	81	80	100	80	85	11 regular 2 premium	20–45
	Pepper Leaf	78	13.00	125.80	83	96	77	100	100	80	70	8	20
PREPARED MEAL SERVICES													
✓	Dinner Ladies	54	9.00 (A)	90.00	86	100	80	100	100	80	80	37	30–40
✓	Thr1ve	81	13.45	155.40	85	96	80	100	100	80	80	44	2–3
	Chefgood	71	11.90	138.00	81	96	75	100	100	90	70	32	2–3
	Soulara	81	11.50	119.40	79	96	72	100	100	80	70	39	2
	Youfoodz	60	9.95	119.40	77	94	69	100	70	70	70	48	2
	Nourish'd	94	15.70	165.20	76	96	67	100	100	80	60	20	2

TABLE NOTES
Recommended We recommend food boxes and prepared meal services that earn a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 85%. **Price** This is the average price for two people ordering three meals a week, excluding delivery fees where applicable. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of performance (70%) and ease of ordering and delivering (30%). **Ease of ordering and delivery score** is based on how easy it is to subscribe, unsubscribe and place an order; if it was delivered on time and with everything ordered; and if it was a safe temperature on arrival. **Performance score** is based on presentation, ease of following the instructions, freshness of ingredients, and accuracy of the recipe or heating time. **(A)** Based on seven meals. ■

Good wrap

Cling wrap may be popular and convenient, but it can also be bad for the environment. **Rebecca Ciaramidaro** rolls out some greener alternatives

NEED TO KNOW

- Cling wrap is very handy, but can potentially end up in landfill.
- It's important to know the correct way to dispose of your cling wrap.
- Consider more sustainable alternatives such as beeswax wrap and reusable silicone pouches.

Cling wrap is a staple in many kitchens, praised as a quick and convenient way of sealing food and leftovers to keep food fresh and out of the rubbish bin. According to leading plastic wrap manufacturer Glad, the cling-wrap market is worth $51 million in Australia, and nine out of 10 households buy it. On the downside, that's a lot of plastic wrap potentially ending up in landfill.

New generation of eco-friendly wraps

As consumers become more conscious of their environmental footprint, manufacturers are releasing 'greener' products, including plant-based, compostable and biodegradable options.

The key to keeping these products 'green' is knowing how to dispose of them properly. Sadly, although there are many 'eco' or 'green' labelling schemes, they aren't mandatory, so there's no verification or accreditation process for these labels.

Putting cling wrap to the test

We tested cling wrap products you're likely to find in the major supermarkets. We also tested some 'green' products available online. We found that they all perform well in terms of adherence and reheating purposes, but they vary in ease of use. If the cling wrap gets caught, splits easily, clings to itself, or if the roll jams or you can easily scratch yourself with the cutting edge, we mark the product down for ease of use.

Our recommended criteria don't take into consideration any 'eco-friendly' benefits. But if you're willing to compromise on ease of use, the **Great Wrap Home Compostable Cling Wrap** is worth a look. Made from potato waste and other compostable biopolymers, it's home-compostable and it topped our test for performance, proving itself excellent for reheating.

IMAGE: GETTY

How to use cling wrap safely

Most cling wraps come with a serrated blade for cutting portions. These blades are exposed so you need to take care when using them. They can also become blunt, making it difficult to cut the cling wrap without it stretching and deforming. Ideally, dispensing cling wrap and creating a clean-edged piece should be pretty effortless.

When using cling wrap for reheating meals in the microwave, avoid contact with the actual food – otherwise you risk 'chemical migration' from the wrap to the food itself. Leave a corner of the dish uncovered to let steam escape. Alternatively, use paper towel or a microwave-safe container.

Similarly, try to minimise contact between cling wrap and food when you're storing food in the fridge, or put it in a reusable container instead.

How to dispose of cling wrap

If your wrap isn't labelled compostable or biodegradable, you'll need to dispose of it in your general rubbish, or possibly recycle it through 'REDcycle' (see more, right). But if it is compostable or biodegradable, you need to know the right way to dispose of it.

HOME COMPOSTABLE

If you have a home compost bin, buying a cling wrap that's 'home compostable' is a great way to divert plastic from landfill. But buying compostable cling wrap and then throwing it in the rubbish bin has little benefit – it'll biodegrade very slowly and there's no guarantee it will break down at all in landfill.

COMMERCIALLY COMPOSTABLE

In our test, the **Ecoduz Compostable Cling Wrap** and **Biotuff Compostable Cling Wrap** are claimed to be 'commercially compostable'. This means they need to go to a commercial composting facility where they get treated with high temperatures to create an organic-rich substance that can then be sold on. Check with your local council to see if it offers kerbside collection. If not, try the Australian Organics Recycling Association to find your nearest facility.

LANDFILL BIODEGRADABLE

If your cling wrap is labelled 'landfill biodegradable', as the **Biogone Cling Wrap** is, you can dispose of it in your general rubbish. Check the label for any specific advice or instructions.

REDCYCLE

Another option to consider is REDcycle. As long as cling wrap doesn't contain PVC, it's generally suitable, so check the pack for the REDcycle logo. There are REDcycle bins in Coles and Woolworths stores across Australia.

But Rebecca Gleghorn, REDcycle's marketing and communications manager, strikes a note of caution: "Products that are biodegradable, degradable, compostable and photodegradable cannot be REDcycled, as they are deliberately designed to disintegrate."

Alternatives to cling wrap

Want to reduce your plastic waste? Cling wrap isn't the only way to seal and keep food fresh. Alternatives include:

Wax wraps

These are cloth wraps coated with beeswax or soy or other plant waxes, making them flexible and helping them 'cling' to food or containers. You can wash and reuse them for up to 12 months, and they're compostable too.

Silicone food savers/huggers

Shallow expandable silicone cups hug around the cut edges of fruit and vegetables. Bear in mind that they can pick up the odours of strong-smelling foods.

Reusable silicone film

This is a flexible, stretchy, reusable, food-grade silicone film that can replace cling wrap and baking paper. It's safe for microwaves, dishwashers and ovens, and is generally recyclable.

Reusable food bags

These silicone or plastic zip-lock bags and pouches let you store foods without using bulky containers. You can also wash and reuse them.

How we test cling wrap

Our home economist Fiona Mair assesses how well each cling wrap adheres and then reseals to different cookware materials: a Pyrex bowl, a porcelain ceramic dish, a plastic bowl and an aluminium bowl. She also carries out a microwave reheating test to find out whether the cling film can withstand heat and any contact with fatty hot food without shrinking or breaking.

She assesses ease of use by checking how easy it is to open the packaging and dispense the cling wrap. She also checks the position of the serrated edge and how neat the cut is.

			PERFORMANCE					SPECIFICATIONS							
Recommended		Price ($)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Performance score (%)	Adherence score (%)	Microwave heating score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Freezer-safe	Microwave-safe	Green claims	BPA-free	Compostable claim	Claimed width (cm)	Length available (m)	Cutting edge type
✓	**Glad Wrap** Cling Wrap 90m	5.00	81	83	85	80	75	✓	✓		✓		33	20, 30, 60, 90	Serrated
✓	**Glad Wrap** 150m (with Ezy-Cutter Bar)	9.95	81	83	85	80	75	✓	✓		✓		33	150, 300, 600	Serrated (B)
✓	**Glad to be Green** 50% Plant Based Cling Wrap 50m	5.00	79	80	80	80	78	✓	✓	✓50%	✓		30	50	Serrated
✓	**Goliath** Cling Wrap 60m	1.39	78	80	80	80	73	✓	✓		✓		33	60, 300	Serrated
✓	**Multix** Plant Based Cling Wrap 20m	2.00	78	83	85	80	65	✓	✓	✓45%	✓		33	20	Serrated
✓	**Multix** Cling Wrap 60m	2.50	77	78	75	80	73	ns	✓		✓		33	60, 90, 300	Serrated
✓	**OSO** Cling Wrap 60m	3.00	77	78	75	80	73	ns	✓		ns		33	60	Serrated
	Great Wrap Home Compostable Cling Wrap 30m	7.48	76	90	80	100	43	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	30	30	Serrated
✓	**Essentials** Cling Wrap 60m	1.40	74	75	80	70	73	✓	✓		✓		33	60, 300	Serrated
✓	**Biogone** Landfill-Biodegradable Cling Wrap 80m	5.90	73	75	80	70	68	✓	✓	✓	✓		33	80, 600, 1200	Serrated
✓	**Coles** Cling Wrap 60m	1.40	73	73	75	70	73	ns	✓		ns		33	60, 300	Serrated
✓	**Coles** Cling Wrap Super Stretch and Cling 30m	1.90	73	73	75	70	73	✓	✓		ns		33	30	Serrated
✓	**Hercules** Cling Wrap 70m	3.50	73	73	75	70	73	✓	✓		ns		33	70	Serrated
✓	**Coles** Cling Wrap 300m	6.75	72	73	75	70	70	ns	✓		ns		33	60, 300	Serrated
✓	**Essentials** Cling Wrap 300m	6.75	72	75	80	70	65	✓	✓		✓		33	60, 300	Serrated
	Sugar Wrap Eco Cling Wrap 60m	8.99	72	78	75	80	58	✓	✓	✓	✓		30	60	Slide cutter
✓	**Armada** Cling Wrap 60m	3.00	71	73	75	70	65	✓	✓		ns		33	60, 150	Serrated
	Biogone Home Compostable Cling Wrap 30m	5.20	70	75	80	70	58	✓	ns	✓	✓	✓	30	30	Cardboard edge (C)
	Compostic 100% Home Compostable Cling Wrap 30m	4.50	68	78	85	70	43	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	33	30, 50	Cardboard edge (C)
	Ecoduz Compostable Cling Wrap 100m	20.00	67	78	85	70	40	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓(A)	30	100	Perforated portions
	Black & Gold Cling Wrap 30m	1.50	66	73	75	70	50	ns	✓		ns		33	60	Serrated
	Bio Tuff Compostable Cling Wrap 30m (100 perforated sheets)	15.90	65	75	80	70	43	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓(A)	30	30	Perforated portions
	Sugar Wrap Eco Cling Wrap 100% Compostable 30m	5.50	65	75	80	70	43	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	33	30	Perforated portions

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend cling wraps that have a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 70% and ease of use of at least 60%. **Price** Price paid in July 2021. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). **(A)** Certified commercially compostable. **(B)** With a slide cutter. **(C)** These products also have perforated portions. **ns** Not specified. ■

IMAGES: GETTY | AMAZON.COM.AU/FOOD-HUGGERS-REUSABLE-SILICONE-SAVERS/DP/B01J4ADMJM | NYMAG.COM/STRATEGIST/ARTICLE/BEST-REUSABLE-ECO-FRIENDLY-FOOD-STORAGE-BAGS.HTML

THE FOOD ISSUE

SLICE WORK

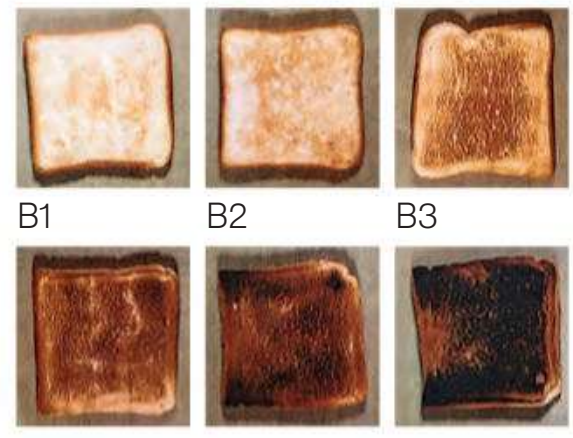
Toasters may not be the most glamorous appliance, but no kitchen is complete without one. **Kim Gilmour** sees which models make the cut

The CHOICE small-appliances laboratory churns through a lot of toast to find which toasters are best at their job. Our experts scrutinise the toast for any imperfections, photographing it for our records (yes, really) before it gets eaten.

Previously we recommended toasters with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 70%. But because we think there's still room for improvement – and to recognise the best of the best – this year we've upped our toaster recommendation threshold to 75%.

Optimising the toasters

Using standard white supermarket bread, our testers run in the toasters for one cycle. They then determine the best browning control settings for each toaster using a standard reference photograph that illustrates our ideal toast colour (B4). This may take a few cycles to perfect.



B1 B2 B3

B4 B5 B6

Performance tests

EVENNESS OF BROWNING AND 'REPEATABILITY' TESTS

We test evenness of browning and consistency over four cycles. A great toaster will score very well for evenness of browning on both sides and will deliver consistent results, cycle after cycle.

NEED TO KNOW

- To recommend a toaster and find the best of the best, we've raised our score threshold to 75%.
- Our test criteria include evenness of toasting, and how easy the toaster is to operate and clean.

TEMPERATURE

We don't recommend any toaster that registers a surface temperature higher than 78°C.

FROZEN BREAD

We toast bread that's come directly out of the freezer using the defrost setting if there is one. We assess evenness of cooking and consistency of colour across cycles.

SINGLE SLICE & MULTIGRAIN

We look at how well a single slice of bread is toasted, as well as how well the toaster handles multigrain bread.

Ease of use

Our experts look at how easy it is to use the controls, lock the bread carriage into position, remove and replace the crumb tray, and clean the exterior.

STATEMENT PIECE

82%

KitchenAid Pro Line Artisan 5KMT2204ACA0

If you're prepared to spend big for your toast, then this stylish KitchenAid 2-slice toaster may be worth a look. It has excellent controls with a fancy motorised carriage. Toasting evenness is excellent, as is the toasting consistency, cycle after cycle. On the downside, it's not very good at toasting multigrain bread.

BUDGET TWO-SLICE BUY

77%

Morphy Richards Equip 2 Slice Toaster MRET02B

This two-slice toaster with a stainless-steel body is simple but effective. It has very easy to use controls, including a browning control dial, high-lift carriage and a frozen bread (defrost) setting.

The crumb tray is rated excellent for cleaning and there are only minor dirt-trapping spaces. Crucially, it's excellent at producing the same toast cycle after cycle. For those who like multigrain bread, it's very good at toasting this.

2-SLICE TOASTERS			PERFORMANCE											SPECIFICATIONS				
Recommended		Price ($)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Frozen bread score (%)	Multigrain score (%)	Toasting evenness score (%)	Single slice score (%)	Toasting consistency cycle after cycle score (%)	Ease of cleaning crumb tray score (%)	Ease of cleaning exterior score (%)	Ease of using controls score (%)	Measured toasting time (min:sec)	Crumpet or bagel setting	High lift carriage	Dimensions (cm, L x W x H)	Bread carriage dimensions (mm, L x W x H)
✓	**KitchenAid** Pro Line Artisan 5KMT2204ACA0	379	82	79	90	83	50	90	65	95	90	90	90	3:00	✓		35 x 18 x 23	150 x 30 x 135
✓	**Morphy Richards** Equip Toaster MRET02B	60	77	76	80	65	80	70	65	90	90	70	80	3:30		✓	29 x 19 x 21	150 x 35 x 145
✓	**Kambrook** The Smarter Choice KTA120WHT	29	76	73	82	75	50	70	65	95	90	90	70	3:00		✓	28 x 17 x 19	135 x 30 x 120
✓	**Sunbeam** Quantum Plus Toaster TA2320	35	76	80	65	70	80	80	75	90	70	40	80	3:15		✓	27 x 17 x 19	135 x 35 x 115
	Breville The Lift & Look Pro BTA730*	169	75	70	86	40	50	80	75	90	90	90	80	3:00	✓	✓	40 x 19 x 20	255 x 30 x 125
✓	**KitchenAid** Toaster 5AKMT223OB	239	75	75	75	75	60	80	75	80	70	60	90	4:15	✓		28 x 19 x 21	145 x 42 x 150
	Smeg TSF02BLAU	229	74	72	80	60	50	70	85	90	90	70	80	4:25	✓		41 x 21 x 22	260 x 35 x 110
	Smeg TSF01PBAU	189	73	67	86	65	80	60	45	75	90	90	80	3:00	✓		32 x 19 x 20	145 x 30 x 125
	Sunbeam Diamond Collection TA1900	50	73	72	76	83	40	70	75	90	90	70	70	3:15			28 x 18 x 19	141 x 37 x 140
	Breville The Lift and Look Plus BTA360WHT	75	72	69	80	83	40	80	35	95	90	70	80	3:10		✓	28 x 17 x 20	148 x 39 x 138
	DeLonghi Distinta Flair CTI2003.GR	129	72	70	76	80	60	70	65	75	90	70	70	3:25	✓	✓	34 x 21 x 22	140 x 30 x 135
	Russell Hobbs Classic RHT12BRU	50	71	74	63	75	70	80	75	70	90	40	60	2:10		✓	27 x 17 x 20	170 x 35 x 140
	Kambrook Perfect Slice Toaster KTA270	59	70	69	71	70	60	70	75	70	90	40	80	2:12		✓	28 x 17 x 20	135 x 30 x 110
	Sunbeam Long Slot Toaster TA4520	49	70	71	68	73	50	80	65	80	70	50	80	3:10		✓	30 x 16 x 20	145 x 30 x 125
	Breville The Toast Select Luxe BTA735SHY	200	69	67	74	58	70	50	65	90	90	50	80	4:07	✓	✓	34 x 17 x 19	140 x 35 x 125
	Kmart Anko Stainless Steel Toaster LD-T7007	20	69	66	77	70	50	70	55	80	90	60	80	2:35		✓	25 x 17 x 19	131 x 35 x 120
	Cuisinart Toaster Stainless Steel CPT-5A	119	68	67	71	70	60	60	45	90	90	40	80	2:55	✓	✓	26 x 16 x 19	138 x 37 x 133
	DeLonghi Icona Capitals Toaster CTOC2003.Y	139	65	64	67	60	70	70	75	50	90	40	70	2:05	✓	✓	34 x 20 x 21	135 x 35 x 120
	Sunbeam Turbo Toaster TA7720	100	64	61	71	80	40	50	75	70	90	40	80	1:58		✓	29 x 19 x 20	140 x 30 x 120
	Kenwood Mesmerine TCM810PU	189	63	62	66	70	40	70	55	70	70	70	60	3:30	✓	✓	29 x 19 x 21	142 x 37 x 210
	Westinghouse Toaster WHTS2S03K	39	62	58	71	55	40	50	80	70	90	40	80	1:53		✓	23 x 14 x 17	130 x 20 x 100
	Kmart Anko Stainless Steel Toaster LD-T7037	35	61	55	74	30	40	50	65	80	90	50	80	2:35		✓	31 x 19 x 21	130 x 30 x 105

TABLE NOTES FOR 2-SLICE AND 4-SLICE TOASTERS Recommended We recommend toasters with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 75% and that have a safe exterior temperature. **Price** Recommended retail as of August 2021. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). **Performance score** includes toasting evenness and consistency of results cycle after cycle (50%), multigrain bread (20%), single-slice bread (15%) and frozen bread (15%). **Ease of use score** includes how easy it is to remove crumbs (30%), clean the exterior (30%) and operate the controls (40%). **Toasting time** refers to measured toasting of white bread. *Many members have complained about this toaster's long-term reliability, so we've withdrawn our recommendation. All toasters are made in China.

IMAGE: GETTY

LIGHT IT UP

79%

Morphy Richards Illumination 4 Slice Toaster 248020

$150

Our experts could find nothing in particular they didn't like about this matte-black four-slice toaster, whose base lights up blue while it's on. It's very good at toasting multigrain bread and browning evenly.

ALL-ROUNDER

78%

Russell Hobbs Addison 4 Slice Toaster RHT514BLK

$90

This toaster is a good all-rounder with decent performance scores. It's very good at browning evenly. The main downside is that the crumb tray is difficult to remove and replace, and it can be fiddly to clean. (A companion kettle is also available, although in our tests it didn't score as well as the toaster.) The toaster comes in both matte black (the version we tested) and stainless steel. ■

4-SLICE TOASTERS			PERFORMANCE											SPECIFICATIONS				
Recommended		Price ($)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Frozen bread score (%)	Multigrain score (%)	Toasting evenness score (%)	Single slice score (%)	Toasting consistency cycle after cycle score (%)	Ease of cleaning crumb tray score (%)	Ease of cleaning exterior score (%)	Ease of using controls score (%)	Measured toasting time (min:sec)	Crumpet or bagel setting	High lift carriage	Dimensions (cm, L x W x H)	Bread carriage dimensions (mm, L x W x H)
✓	**Morphy Richards** Illumination Toaster 248020	150	79	81	74	75	80	80	75	90	70	70	80	4:07		✓	28 x 29 x 19	155 x 25 x 125
✓	**Russell Hobbs** Addison Toaster RHT514BLK	90	78	79	74	75	70	80	75	90	50	90	80	4:11		✓	27 x 29 x 19	140 x 25 x 115
✓	**KitchenAid** 5AKMT423OB	289	75	75	75	85	40	80	75	90	90	40	90	4:05	✓		29 x 33 x 21	140 x 35 x 125
✓	**Russell Hobbs** Legacy Toaster RHT455WHI	100	75	80	64	85	80	80	55	90	70	50	70	4:30		✓	29 x 30 x 19	140 x 30 x 115
	Russell Hobbs Honeycomb Toaster RHT704BLK	80	74	78	65	85	70	80	55	90	70	40	80	5:11		✓	27 x 29 x 20	140 x 35 x 115
	Sunbeam New York Collection Toaster Black Bronze TA4440KB	169	74	72	80	85	40	80	55	90	90	70	80	2:55		✓	27 x 33 x 20	141 x 35 x 132
	Sunbeam Maestro Dark Toaster TA6440DS	109	72	71	74	65	60	80	45	90	90	50	80	2:55	✓	✓	42 x 21 x 20	260 x 40 x 105
	Breville The 'A Bit More' Plus BTA440BSS	100	71	71	71	58	60	70	90	75	90	40	80	2:55		✓	39 x 15 x 19	260 x 30 x 110
	Breville The 'Lift & Look' Plus BTA380WHT	110	71	71	71	65	50	80	90	70	90	40	80	2:45		✓	40 x 17 x 20	260 x 30 x 110
	Kmart Anko Stainless Steel Toaster LD-T7021B	45	67	66	68	65	70	70	55	65	70	50	80	4:15		✓	30 x 30 x 19	155 x 25 x 120
	Breville The Toast Control 4 LTA670BSS	150	66	64	71	78	50	80	35	70	90	40	80	4:00		✓	28 x 29 x 21	140 x 30 x 135
	Kambrook A Perfect Fit Toaster KTA140WHT	50	66	66	67	65	60	70	25	90	90	40	70	4:05		✓	39 x 16 x 18	260 x 30 x 115
	Kmart Anko Stainless Steel Toaster LD-T7009	35	66	66	65	63	40	60	75	90	70	40	80	2:28		✓	27 x 28 x 19	130 x 30 x 100
	Russell Hobbs Heritage Vogue Toaster RHT54RBY	100	65	66	63	55	70	70	55	70	90	40	60	2:00		✓	29 x 27 x 19	135 x 35 x 110
	Kmart Anko Euro Toaster T382D	39	64	59	74	73	40	60	65	60	90	50	80	2:35		✓	26 x 31 x 19	141 x 37 x 128
	Sunbeam Alinea Collection Toaster TA2740K	129	64	61	71	75	50	60	45	70	90	40	80	2:58		✓	29 x 30 x 20	140 x 35 x 110
	Breville The Smart Toast BTA845	249	63	52	90	38	50	60	85	35	90	90	90	3:55	✓		29 x 30 x 20	140 x 35 x 125
	Morphy Richards 240006	170	63	61	67	65	50	80	55	50	90	40	70	3:50			29 x 30 x 22	140 x 30 x 130
	Russell Hobbs Brooklyn Toaster Copper RHT94COP	100	62	58	70	70	40	60	45	70	90	50	70	2:20		✓	27 x 27 x 19	141 x 37 x 135
	DeLonghi Brillante Exclusive CTJX4003.BK	149	61	57	71	45	70	60	55	50	90	40	80	2:30		✓	33 x 29 x 21	140 x 35 x 120
	Sunbeam Quantum Plus Toaster TA2340	45	60	55	72	48	60	30	65	75	70	90	60	3:20		✓	38 x 17 x 19	250 x 30 x 125
	Sunbeam Simply Shine Toaster TAP4004BK	90	52	46	65	53	50	30	55	50	70	40	80	3:14		✓	29 x 28 x 20	140 x 30 x 120

IMAGE: GETTY

Stain relief

Which detergents are best for lifting stubborn stains? It may depend on your type of washing machine, says **Rebecca Ciaramidaro**

Laundry is a never-ending cycle, a chore that just keeps coming, but teaming your washing machine with the right detergent can help you make light work of it. On the flipside, get the laundry detergent wrong and you may as well be washing with water alone.

So we put the laundry detergents you're likely to find in the major supermarkets to the test against a range of common laundry stains.

Your type of machine matters

According to our results, the type of washing machine you use seems to play a role in the type of laundry detergent you should buy.

Powder detergents appear at the top of the top loader table, whereas liquid detergents appear at the top of the front loader table. But why?

HOW WASHING WORKS: ALKALINITY VS ENZYMES

Top-loader washing machines have a faster wash cycle, which may favour the chemical cleaning power of detergents. This means powders have an advantage over liquids because they're usually more alkaline and can work quickly in a short wash.

By contrast, front-loader washing machines have a much longer wash cycle. This favours liquid detergents because their cleaning power tends to come from enzymes rather than their alkalinity, and longer cycles give the enzymes more time to work.

NEED TO KNOW

- To choose the best detergent, you have to factor in what type of washing machine you use.
- Powder detergents tend to perform better in top-loader machines.
- Liquid detergents tend to perform better in front loaders.

Best Buys

For the laundry detergents in this test, you can spend anything from five cents right up to 91 cents a wash. There are some products that offer great value for money, but don't quite meet our criteria to be recommended. But these products are still worth considering, so we've classified them as Best Buys. To be named a Best Buy, a detergent must score at least 70% for front loaders and 60% for top loaders, and cost less than 30 cents a wash.

How we test laundry detergents

We use pre-stained fabric swatches attached to set loads of cotton materials to assess stain removal. This way, we can be sure we're comparing all laundry detergents fairly in identical conditions.

These swatches are embedded with a selection of the most common stains – as chosen by you, our members. Using the recommended dose of detergent (in either a front loader or top loader), we then run the washing machine through a standard cold (20°C) washing cycle.

Once the cycle has finished, we use a spectrophotometer to measure how clean the swatches are compared with their pre-wash condition.

TOP LOADERS			COSTS		PERFORMANCE									SPECIFICATIONS				
Recommended	Best Buy		Price paid ($)	Cost per wash ($)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	General detergency score (%)	Perspiration score (%)	Grass/mud score (%)	Olive oil score (%)	Makeup score (%)	Chocolate ice cream score (%)	Baby food score (%)	Bloods score (%)	Powder, liquid or capsule	Safe for septics claim	Has optical brighteners claim	Size of pack costed (g or mL or number of capsules)	Number of washes per pack (calculated)
✓	✓	**Coles** Lemon Fresh Laundry Powder Hot and Cold Wash	3.70	0.15	61	64	59	68	53	41	60	45	74	P			4000	24
		Cold Power Clean and Fresh Powder	17.50	0.63	59	59	55	69	55	42	62	50	68	P			1800	28
		Aldi Laundrite Laundry Powder	3.69	0.11	57	56	56	67	53	46	55	40	73	P	✓		4000	33
		Omo Laundry Detergent Ultimate	22.00	0.71	57	62	48	71	51	53	65	62	17	P	✓	✓	1800	31
		Aldi Almat Laundry Powder Concentrate Arctic Breeze	4.99	0.13	55	58	49	62	51	43	59	39	59	P		✓	2000	39
		Coles Ultra Concentrate Laundry Powder	6.50	0.19	55	58	49	64	50	44	62	42	59	P			2000	35
		Omo Laundry Detergent Active	22.00	0.50	55	60	48	68	51	53	60	56	20	P	✓	✓	2000	44
		Cold Power Advanced Clean Powder	17.50	0.36	54	55	50	64	54	45	60	47	52	P			2000	48
		Omo Laundry Detergent With A Touch Of Comfort	22.00	0.44	53	58	46	63	50	51	63	51	21	P	✓	✓	2000	50
		Woolworths Essentials Laundry Powder Bright Clean Wash	3.69	0.12	52	50	53	63	46	43	50	42	51	P			4000	31
		Cold Power Sensitive Pure Clean Powder	17.50	0.36	51	49	48	64	49	41	52	46	49	P			2000	48
		Coles Ion Laundry Liquid Concentrate Original	18.00	0.55	51	48	51	61	52	67	58	54	11	L			2000	33
		Coles Ultra Concentrate Laundry Capsules	8.00	0.40	51	49	45	63	56	60	60	64	12	C			20	20
		Fab Intense Fresh Powder	7.00	0.21	51	50	46	64	48	44	54	37	64	P			1800	34
		Fab Perfume Indulgence Gold Absolute Powder	12.99	0.18	51	50	46	63	47	46	51	42	63	P			3800	72
		Coles Ion Laundry Capsules Original	24.00	0.67	50	48	47	64	50	61	57	60	10	C			36	36
		Coles Ultra Concentrate Sensitive Laundry Powder	6.50	0.18	50	49	47	63	49	41	52	44	53	P			2000	37
		Fab Essential Oils Red Japanese Cherry Blossom & Green Tea Powder	7.00	0.21	50	49	45	61	47	40	54	40	64	P			1800	33
		Coles Ion Laundry Liquid Concentrate Colours	18.00	0.54	49	46	47	62	53	62	58	53	10	L			2000	33
		Coles Ultra Concentrate Laundry Liquid	6.50	0.18	49	46	44	64	51	60	56	55	12	L			2000	36
		Dynamo Professional Discs	24.00	0.86	49	47	45	59	54	57	63	62	12	C			28	28
		Dynamo Professional Our Best Stain Removal Oxi Plus Liquid	20.00	0.54	49	47	45	59	54	61	57	56	13	L			1800	37
		Omo Laundry Detergent Sensitive	22.00	0.51	49	49	45	66	48	55	44	43	30	P		✓	2000	43
		Omo Laundry Detergent Ultimate	22.00	0.64	49	47	49	60	49	62	59	56	9	L		✓	1800	34
		Omo Laundry Detergent Ultimate Sensitive	22.00	0.65	49	47	47	61	49	64	55	58	10	L		✓	1800	34
		Cold Power Triple Caps	20.00	0.67	48	46	43	58	51	58	65	64	11	C			30	30
		Omo Laundry Detergent Active	22.00	0.56	48	45	44	61	49	64	55	54	9	L		✓	2000	39
		Omo Laundry Detergent Triple Capsules	22.00	0.73	48	46	46	58	50	62	57	64	9	C			30	30
		Aldi Trimat Advanced Concentrated Laundry Liquid	7.99	0.13	47	44	45	60	50	56	58	56	11	L	✓		2000	60
		Aldi Trimat Advanced Concentrated Laundry Liquid Sensitive	7.99	0.14	47	44	44	62	51	60	56	56	11	L	✓		2000	57
		Dynamo Professional 7 Actions in 1 Wash Liquid	20.00	0.56	47	45	44	57	52	61	56	53	12	L	✓		1800	36
		Dynamo Professional Deep Clean with Odour Eliminating Technology Liquid	20.00	0.56	47	44	44	57	50	60	60	56	12	L	✓		1800	36
		Dynamo Professional Free & Clear Liquid	20.00	0.56	47	45	43	59	52	57	57	52	12	L			1800	36
		Omo Dilute At Home Refill	17.50	0.42	47	44	44	61	52	58	56	56	11	L		✓	2000	42
		Water only	0.00	0.00	41	40	34	54	41	43	49	48	14	L	na	na	na	na

FRONT LOADERS			COSTS		PERFORMANCE									SPECIFICATIONS					
Recommended	Best Buy		Price paid ($)	Cost per wash ($)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	General detergency score (%)	Perspiration score (%)	Grass/mud score (%)	Olive oil score (%)	Makeup score (%)	Chocolate ice cream score (%)	Baby food score (%)	Blood score (%)	Powder, liquid or capsule	Safe for septics claim	Has enzymes claim	Has optical brighteners claim	Size of pack costed (g or mL or number of capsules)	Number of washes per pack (calculated)
✓		**Coles** Ultra Concentrate Laundry Capsules	8.00	0.40	85	84	78	98	88	89	93	100	58	C				20	20
✓		**Dynamo** Professional Discs	24.00	0.86	85	82	79	97	88	91	100	100	57	C				28	28
✓		**Dynamo** Professional 7 Actions in 1 Wash Liquid	20.00	0.56	84	83	78	95	85	87	94	89	60	L	✓			1800	36
✓	✓	**Aldi** Trimat Advanced Concentrated Laundry Liquid	7.99	0.13	83	83	76	96	86	83	91	93	56	L	✓	✓		2000	60
✓		**Omo** Laundry Detergent Triple Capsules	22.00	0.73	83	83	75	100	84	90	94	93	44	C		✓		30	30
✓		**Dynamo** Professional Free & Clear Liquid	20.00	0.56	82	80	76	95	84	84	93	84	65	L				1800	36
✓		**Coles** Ion Laundry Liquid Concentrate Colours	18.00	0.54	81	79	80	96	80	85	92	85	49	L				2000	33
✓		**Coles** Ion Laundry Liquid Concentrate Original	18.00	0.55	81	82	71	97	80	85	93	89	53	L				2000	33
✓		**Dynamo** Professional Our Best Stain Removal Oxi Plus Liquid	20.00	0.54	81	80	78	94	76	86	87	89	58	L				1800	37
✓		**Dynamo** Professional Deep Clean with Odour Eliminating Technology Liquid	20.00	0.56	80	76	76	94	82	84	93	90	59	L	✓			1800	36
		Coles Ion Laundry Capsules Original	24.00	0.67	79	78	71	96	78	91	91	90	42	C				36	36
		Omo Laundry Detergent Ultimate	22.00	0.71	79	85	71	99	76	49	83	89	40	P	✓	✓	✓	1800	31
		Cold Power Advanced Clean Powder	17.50	0.36	78	83	78	93	69	44	64	54	96	P				2000	48
		Cold Power Triple Caps	20.00	0.67	78	73	73	90	85	86	96	94	41	C				30	30
	✓	**Coles** Ultra Concentrate Laundry Powder	6.50	0.19	78	84	77	87	73	47	70	46	93	P				2000	35
		Omo Laundry Detergent Ultimate Sensitive	22.00	0.65	78	76	67	97	75	89	94	90	38	L		✓	✓	1800	34
	✓	**Aldi** Almat Laundry Powder Concentrate Arctic Breeze	4.99	0.13	77	83	76	86	71	45	68	43	93	P			✓	2000	39
		Cold Power Advanced Clean Liquid	11.00	0.52	77	77	72	85	79	80	85	91	48	L				1000	21
		Omo Laundry Detergent Active Liquid	22.00	0.56	77	74	71	94	74	89	91	90	35	L		✓	✓	2000	39
		Omo Laundry Detergent Active Powder	22.00	0.50	77	83	70	95	73	53	78	81	39	P	✓	✓	✓	2000	44
		Omo Laundry Detergent Ultimate	22.00	0.64	77	75	67	97	76	92	94	90	38	L		✓	✓	1800	34
		Omo Laundry Detergent Dual Capsules	22.00	0.73	76	73	67	95	79	90	79	84	42	C		✓		30	30
		Cold Power Clean and Fresh Powder	17.50	0.63	75	80	76	88	63	41	56	49	97	P				1800	28
	✓	**Coles** Ultra Concentrate Laundry Liquid	6.50	0.18	75	75	68	83	76	78	85	86	47	L				2000	36
		Omo Laundry Detergent with a Touch of Comfort	22.00	0.44	75	82	69	91	71	53	80	80	36	P	✓	✓	✓	2000	50
		Cold Power Clean and Fresh Liquid	17.50	0.49	74	71	72	82	78	81	89	88	46	L	✓			1800	36
		Omo Laundry Detergent Dual Capsules Sensitive	22.00	0.73	74	72	65	93	79	91	76	84	40	C		✓		30	30
		Omo Laundry Detergent Expert Mixed Colours & Blacks	22.00	0.61	74	73	65	89	72	81	91	86	40	L		✓		1800	36
		Omo Laundry Detergent Expert Odour Eliminator	22.00	0.64	74	72	66	90	73	81	91	88	42	L		✓	✓	1800	34
	✓	**Aldi** Laundrite Laundry Powder	3.69	0.08	71	74	76	84	65	44	54	34	81	P	✓			4000	49
	✓	**Aldi** Trimat Advanced Concentrated Laundry Liquid Sensitive	7.99	0.14	71	69	67	77	77	75	83	83	41	L	✓			2000	57
		Water only	0.00	0.00	51	45	44	78	60	49	63	54	18	L	na	na	na	na	na

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend front loader detergents with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 80%, and top loader detergents with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 60%. Best Buy is awarded to front loaders that have a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 70% and cost less than 30c per wash, and top loaders with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 60% that cost less than 30c per wash. **Price** What we paid for the pack size listed in May 2021. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of general detergency (35%), natural oils sebum/perspiration (20%), grass/mud (15%), olive oil (7%), blood (6%), chocolate ice cream (6%), makeup (6%) and baby food (5%). **Type P** Powder, **L** Liquid, **C** Capsule. **na** Not applicable. ■

IMAGE: GETTY

Double trouble?

Two for one may sound great, but washer dryers don't always live up to their promise, says **Ashley Iredale**

Wouldn't it be good if you could throw your dirty laundry in the wash before work and come home to clean, dry clothes hanging neatly in your wardrobe?

Sadly, that last part is a long way from the reality, but the dream could at least get one step closer with a washer dryer combo.

What exactly is a washer dryer combo?

Washer dryer combos combine a front-loading washing machine and a condenser clothes dryer into a single appliance that's the same size as an equivalent standalone washer.

They typically offer all the features of mid- to high-end washers and dryers, so they promise to do everything standalone washers and dryers can do, but with half the footprint.

And the smaller your living space, the bigger an advantage that becomes.

Pros and cons

PROS

Their washing performance is comparable to that of an equivalent standalone appliance.

- Half the footprint of two separate appliances.
- You can wash and dry your clothes without manual intervention.

NEED TO KNOW

- Washer dryer combos are great if you're short on space and only use a dryer sparingly.
- You'll get comparable washing performance but much better drying performance from standalone appliances.

- You can wash or dry independently, so you can use it as a normal washer with the peace of mind of a dryer for emergencies.

CONS

- You can only dry half the capacity that you can wash (at one time).
- You'll need to wait for the machine to finish washing and drying before you can add another load, so washing multiple loads is impractical.
- They can use a huge amount of water, and take a long time, to dry.
- Heat-pump combos are energy efficient but are complicated and expensive.
- Their complexity means they're more prone to breakdowns than standalone appliances.

How they work

For washing, they work the same way as a conventional front-loading washing machine does, so performance will be comparable to a standalone appliance. When it comes to drying, though, it's a different story. The dryer in washer dryer combos is a sealed, condenser dryer, because a washing machine with open vents would be bad news for your carpets.

Unlike a simple vented dryer that pumps hot wet air straight out into your laundry, condenser dryers capture the moisture from your clothes. They push warm, dry air through your wet washing to extract moisture, then cool the now humid air in a heat exchanger to condense it. It's then collected in a tank or pumped down the drain. The (now dry) air is reheated and the cycle repeats.

The heart of any condenser dryer is the heat exchanger, which passes the hot air through metal fins with a large surface area to facilitate cooling. In standalone dryers these fins are air cooled, but washer dryer combos use water instead. This makes sense from an engineering point of view because water conducts heat more efficiently, and because it's also a washer it already has the plumbing in place.

After a few cycles the water becomes too warm, so it's drained out, and fresh, cool water is drawn in. Rinse and repeat, as it were, until your clothes are dry. How much water is used will vary between models, but sometimes it can be quite a lot – more even than used for washing. Models in our test averaged 35L of water to dry our 3.5kg test load, but one very thirsty outlier used 149L, and would use a staggering 210L (stated by manufacturer) to dry a full load – and that's in addition to water for washing.

They can use a staggering amount of water... bad news in a dry country like Australia

That's bad news in a dry country like Australia. And you won't be able to tell which machines use more water for drying by looking at the water efficiency labels. Due to an old loophole in the way water efficiency ratings are calculated, only the water used for washing is counted, not drying.

Washer dryer combos are also slow. Although they use about the same amount of energy as an equivalent condenser dryer to dry, they take about twice as long to do it – three-and-a-half hours on average, but it can also be more than six hours (long enough to line-dry your clothes). This isn't an issue if you put your laundry on overnight or while you're at work, but it can be frustrating if sweating on clean clothes.

Energy efficiency

The energy consumption of a washer dryer is comparable to that of using a standalone washing machine and condenser dryer. However, if you use a dryer regularly, you're better off using a heat pump dryer as it uses much less energy.

To put that into context, if like most Australians you wash in cold water, your washer dryer combo will use roughly 10 times as much energy to dry your clothes as it will to wash them.

There are washer dryer combos that use heat pump technology. They're very energy-efficient and don't use any water to dry, but they're exponentially more complex and expensive.

Capacity

A quirk of combos is that their washing and drying capacities are different because your clothes can be packed in tightly for washing, but to dry effectively they need plenty of space for air to circulate. Because most of us only fill our washing machines to half their capacity (which is why we test using 3.5kg of laundry, not a full load) that's not necessarily an issue, but if you wash full loads you'll need to dry in two batches.

This is inconvenient enough, but factor in how long some of these appliances actually take to dry and this could become unworkable. It also means you can't wash a second load of clothes while the first is in the dryer, as you can with standalone appliances.

Washer dryer combos can be a great solution for cramped apartments

Should I buy a washer dryer combo?

The short answer is that it depends on your type of household and how often you think you'll use it. Washer dryer combos can be a great solution for cramped apartments if you only use your dryer from time to time, but if you use the dryer regularly and you've got a big family (or just big laundry requirements) then you're probably better off with standalone appliances – you'll get much better drying performance, and can wash and dry multiple loads simultaneously.

Washer dryer combos are also expensive, so if you're on a budget, buying a standalone washer and dryer can save a few dollars if you opt for a cheaper vented dryer (or clothes horse).

You're also hedging your bets if something breaks down, because you only need to replace one appliance, not both at once, and the added complexity means there's a higher risk of something going wrong. Our reliability survey shows that washer dryer combo owners have had more issues with their appliance than owners of conventional washing machines, although combo quality has been steadily improving in recent years.

BEST OVERALL

81%
Bosch WNA254U1AU

Washing performance: 83%
Drying performance: 75%

81%
Miele WTH130WPM

Washing performance: 81%
Drying performance: 80%

BEST ON A BUDGET

75%
Samsung WD85T554DBW

Washing performance: 81%
Drying performance: 62%

		COSTS		PERFORMANCE							SPECIFICATIONS								
Recommended		Price ($)	Running costs ($/10 years)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Washing performance (%)	Drying performance (%)	Water used – wash / dry (L)	Cycle time – wash / dry (min)	Noise (dB)	Brand reliability score (%)	Gentle/delicates program	Out-of-balance correction	Handwash-only woollens	Auto-sensing water level	Extra rinse	Tap connection	Capacity – wash / dry (kg)	Warranty (years)	Claimed dimensions (cm, H x W x D)
✓	**Bosch** WNA254U1AU	1799	1853	81	83	75	55 / 25	166 / 133	57	90	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	10 / 5	2	85 x 60 x 59
✓	**Miele** WTH130WPM	3799	1664	81	81	80	49 / 18	146 / 111	54	86	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	7 / 4	2	85 x 60 x 65
✓	**Miele** WTZH730WPM	4299	1857	79	81	75	55 / 15	146 / 128	59	86	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	8 / 5	2	85 x 60 x 72
	Fisher & Paykel WD8560F1	1649	2112	75	77	69	73 / 37	124 / 152	57	82	✓	✓		✓	✓	C only	8.5 / 5	2	85 x 60 x 65
✓	**Samsung** WD75M4453JW	1319	2118	75	80	63	56 / 46	142 / 179	58	87		ns		✓	✓	C only	7.5 / 4	2	85 x 60 x 60
✓	**Samsung** WD85T554DBW	1199	1823	75	81	62	61 / 15	163 / 206	57	87	✓	ns		✓	✓	H & C	8.5 / 6	2	85 x 60 x 74
	LG WVC5-1409W	1379	2415	73	80	58	55 / 47	175 / 214	65	88	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	9 / 5	2	85 x 60 x 56
	Electrolux EWW1042ADWA	2149	2304	72	80	54	61 / 45	111 / 208	62	82	✓	✓		✓		C only	10 / 6	2	85 x 60 x 66
	LG WVC9-1410W	1699	2468	72	81	50	53 / 60	170 / 255	63	88	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	10 / 6	2	85 x 60 x 56
	Bosch WVG28420AU	1699	2169	71	78	55	73 / 25	139 / 237	59	90	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	8 / 4.5	2	85 x 60 x 59
	Electrolux EWW7524ADWA	1449	2292	71	79	51	61 / 45	107 / 244	63	82	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	C only	7.5 / 4.5	2	85 x 60 x 58
	Beko BWD7541IG	1049	2084	70	76	55	82 / 17	131 / 226	68	79		✓		✓		C only	7.5 / 4	2	84 x 60 x 59
	Samsung WD95T754DBT	1499	2448	70	82	43	73 / 27	168 / 306	60	87	✓	ns		✓	✓	H & C	9.5 / 6	2	85 x 60 x 69
	Ariston ARWD582WAU	1499	2298	66	76	43	71 / 27	128 / 306	67	na	✓	✓	✓	✓		C only	7.5 / 4.5	2	85 x 60 x 54

TABLE NOTES Recommended We recommend currently available washer dryer combos with a CHOICE Expert Rating of at least 70%, 80% for washing performance and 60% for drying performance. **Price** Recommended retail, as of August 2021. **Running costs** This is an estimate of how much it will cost for water and electricity over 10 years if you wash the equivalent of one load every day using a normal cycle, and dry the equivalent of three loads every week, based on 30c/kWh of electricity and $2 per 1000L for water. Some machines still draw power when the machine is connected to a power source but not in use, so switch off the machine at the power point where possible. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of washing performance (70%) and drying performance (30%). **Washing performance** is made up of dirt removal (40%), rinse performance (20%), gentleness (15%), water efficiency (15%), spin efficiency (10%). **Drying performance** is made up of drying time (40%) and energy efficiency (60%). **Brand reliability,** where we have statistics, is taken from our Brand Reliability Survey, but doesn't add to the overall score. These scores refer to the brand only, not that particular model. Differences of three percent or more between brands are significant. **Tap connection C only** Cold only. **H & C** Hot and cold. Some machines need both hot and cold water to operate. Others connect to cold water only and may need a sealing cap for the hot water inlet. A machine with a heater can be particularly useful if you connect to cold only, as it still gives you the option of a warm or hot wash. **Dimensions** are for the smallest box that fits around the machine, as stated by the manufacturer. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. ■

IMAGE: GETTY

Fund managers

A good budgeting app can help you keep track of where your hard-earned money is going, says **Denis Gallagher**

NEED TO KNOW

- Budgeting apps can clarify spending patterns and help prepare for unexpected costs.
- Most third-party apps do more than the official bank apps – they can categorise expenses and let you set budgets.
- The key choice you'll need to make is whether you manually input transactions or sync directly to your bank account.

Tax returns will soon be rolling in for the more organised individuals among us – and that money can go towards anything from upgrading your home office to enjoying a home delivery or two. Other events such as the Black Friday and Boxing Day sales aren't too far away and encourage you to splurge on things you may need (or want).

A good budgeting app can help you keep control of your financial 'ins and outs' to reveal your spending patterns and prepare for any future bill shocks.

We tested the paid or premium versions of a selection of the most popular apps so we could try out every feature. We also compared them with several bank apps (which we didn't score) to see if the benefits outweigh those that your online bank app already offers.

Keeping in sync

Depending on the app, you can choose to enter all your transactions, upload data you've exported from your bank account, or go the whole way and sync your bank account directly to the app (though some banks won't allow this).

Synchronising your bank account with a budgeting app does most of the work for you and the top four performers all sync with the major banks. But it does mean giving your banking details to the app so that it can scrape your transactional data.

PINS AND PASSWORDS

The six major banks whose apps we included in our test – ANZ, CommBank, ING, NAB, St.George, and Westpac – all clearly state that you're not to share your account PINs and passwords with anyone.

That said, budgeting apps are quick to highlight their own extensive security measures. Ultimately, it's a trade-off between security and convenience. Only you can decide.

Most of the major banks now offer some rudimentary budgeting functionality and graphs and charts. But if you're looking for any detailed forecasting or category spending, then a budgeting app is still the best way to go.

CHOICE Computer magazine

These results highlight the work of the tech experts in our IT publication, *CHOICE Computer*.

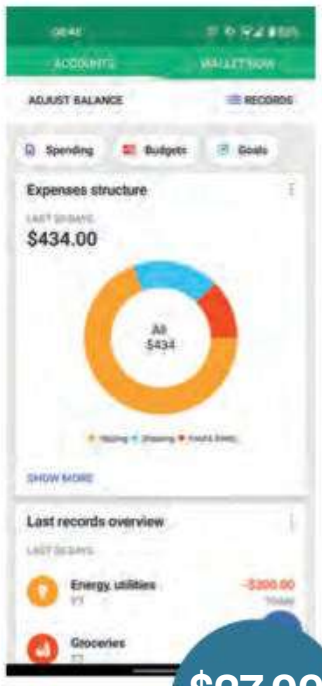
Although we cover plenty of tech items and smart devices in *CHOICE* magazine, they're often things such as smart speakers, phones and home entertainment items. But *CHOICE Computer* is our bimonthly publication dedicated entirely to IT products and software.

We've put the latest *CHOICE Computer* budgeting results together to show you what our tech experts work on every day. If you find this helpful, head to **choice.com.au** for more product reviews and subscription information.

BEST OVERALL

75%

BudgetBakers Wallet Premium



$27.99 per year

This versatile app lets you create labels, use location data, and attach photos to each transaction. Charts and reports display your spending on a category basis, you can view the net total of all synced accounts on one screen, and it gives you a weekly forecast. The Android version lets you set savings goals, but this feature isn't available on the iOS app. It synced well with larger banks, but we found that after an initial sync with a smaller bank (Bank Australia) it stopped working. So this app would be a good companion app for working with the larger financial institutions.

BEST FREE APP

74%

Pocketbook

Free

The Pocketbook App shows that there may in fact be such a thing as a free lunch. Exactly how the app makes its revenue is up for debate, but the fact that it was bought for a multimillion-dollar sum by Zip Co (owners of Zip Pay and Zip Money) means it's clearly a valuable asset. You can use Pocketbook as a manual spending tracker or sync it directly with your bank, even some smaller ones. It displays trends of spending, but charts are only available on the web version – the Android and iOS apps don't have them. You can set savings goals, although how this works varies between Android and iOS. You can also flag possible tax deductions – a rare feature – but only through the web interface.

		COSTS			PERFORMANCE			SPECIFICATIONS															
Recommended		Price ($)	Paid subscription (per year)	Free trial period (days)	CHOICE Expert Rating (%)	Versatility score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Android	iOS	Web browser	Official banking app	Bugeting app	Security PIN	Auto sync with banks	Transaction categories	Set savings goal	Automatically recognises recurring transactions	View scheduled transactions	Generates reports	Displays trends	Spending forecast	Graphs or charts	Attach images to transactions
✓	BudgetBakers Wallet Premium	27.99	✓	14	75	77	73	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(F)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	Pocketbook	Free		na	74	73	76	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		(I)	✓
✓	Spendee Premium	33.99	✓	7	71	72	70	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		(F)	✓		✓		✓	✓
✓	Toshl Medici	53.93	✓	30	71	71	70	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		(F)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Goodbudget Plus	79.24	✓	na	69	69	70	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
	Monefy Pro	4.99 (A)		na	61	56	68	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓							✓	
	Fudget Pro	6.00 (B)		na	54	44	70	✓	✓			✓	✓		(C)							✓	
	ANZ	Free	na	na	na	na	na	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	na	✓	✓	ns	ns	✓(H)				
	Commonwealth Bank	Free	na	na	na	na	na	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	na	✓	✓	(G)	✓	✓(H)	✓		✓	
	ING	Free	na	na	na	na	na	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	na		✓(D)	ns	ns	✓(H)				
	NAB	Free	na	na	na	na	na	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	na	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓(H)				
	St.George	Free	na	na	na	na	na	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	na	✓		ns	✓	✓(H)				
	Westpac	Free	na	na	na	na	na	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	na		(E)	ns	✓	✓(H)				

TABLE NOTES **Recommended** We recommend apps in this test with a CHOICE Expert Rating of 70% and above. We haven't scored the official banking apps for this review, so they're listed in alphabetical order rather than by performance. **Price** The price as of July 2021 for a year's subscription. **CHOICE Expert Rating** is made up of versatility score (60%) and ease of use score (40%). **Versatility score** is made up of implementation of categories (20%), identification of expenditure (20%), clarity of data shown (20%), ability to set budgets (20%), manual entry of data (10%) and ability to sync data (10%). **Ease of use score** is made up of ease of categorisation (25%), ease of identifying expenditure (25%), clarity of data shown (25%) and ease of syncing data between devices (25%). Recurring transactions are either recognised automatically or can be set manually. **(A)** Price in table refers to Android version; iOS is $4.50 for Monefy Pro. **(B)** Price in table refers to Android version; iOS is $6 for Fudget Pro; Windows is $7.15. **(C)** Expenses can be entered as category names. **(D)** Includes a round-up feature that can send a predetermined amount per spend to a savings account. **(E)** In the Westpac Life account only. **(F)** Can be set manually. **(G)** Bills only. **(H)** Bank statement. **(I)** Web version only. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. ■

IMAGE: GETTY

Australia's best brands

We've rated Australia's top brands for performance, reliability and customer satisfaction. **Kim Gilmour** and **Ashley Iredale** give out the gongs

The CHOICE labs regularly test big-ticket items such as fridges, washers, dryers, dishwashers and vacuum cleaners. With years of testing experience under our belts, we can confidently tell you about their performance and ease of use.

Although we aim to cover as much of the market as possible, we can't test every model out there. So we focus on the products you're likely to see in stores and online from the major retailers.

We have years of testing experience under our belts

But what if the product you're considering isn't one we've tested? This is where our Best Brand ratings come in.

They can help guide you in choosing a product, telling you that the brand not

only performed consistently well overall in our lab testing, but that it's also highly regarded by CHOICE members in terms of reliability and satisfaction.

We don't take Best Brand recommendations lightly. We award a company a recommendation only if it has a clear lead over its competitors during the test period, and we don't recognise more than two brands during each 12-month period.

Our Best Brand recommendations cover many other major appliance categories including barbecues and lawnmowers (see *CHOICE* Sep 21), and TVs and laptops (keep an eye out in coming months).

How we score

Best Brand eligibility is tough. For a brand to be in the running, we must have tested at least five of its models in the relevant appliance category, and the brand must have received at least 50 responses in the CHOICE member survey.

On top of that, brands must score a minimum of 60% overall, with above-average test, reliability and satisfaction scores.

The Best Brand score is made up of the average test score, the reliability and satisfaction scores for the brand, and the ratio, which is the percentage of models tested that we recommend.

TEST SCORE

This is the average CHOICE Expert Rating of the products tested in that category. We tend to limit results to products tested within the past three to five years.

What contributes to an average test score is different for each product type, but they're the same criteria that informed the CHOICE Expert Rating in our individual product tests.

RELIABILITY SCORE

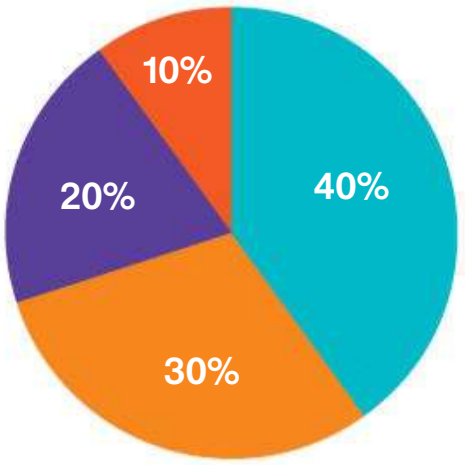
Our customer insights team asks several thousand members in the yearly CHOICE survey whether they've run into any problems with their appliances in the preceding 12 months.

SATISFACTION SCORE

We ask how satisfied members are with their appliances. But this isn't always straightforward. For example, even if a dishwasher has a fault after six months, it can still have a high satisfaction score because other than that fault, the owner thinks the dishwasher is great.

RECOMMENDED RATIO SCORE

This is the percentage of appliances we recommend out of the number we tested for the brand in that category. The greater the proportion that are recommended, the higher the ratio.



HOW WE WEIGHT THE SCORES

- Test – 40%
- Reliability – 30%
- Satisfaction – 20%
- Recommended ratio – 10%

IMAGES: GETTY

FRIDGES

Best Brand: Mitsubishi Electric

This year, Mitsubishi Electric has just edged out previous winner Fisher & Paykel and other strong performers, Electrolux and LG, to become our best fridge brand. Mitsubishi Electric also has the highest reliability and owner satisfaction scores, taken from our 2021 member survey of 3127 CHOICE members who own a fridge. Average scores for each brand are calculated from the 245 fridges we've tested over the past five years.

BRAND	BEST BRAND SCORE (%)	AVERAGE TEST SCORE (%)	RELIABILITY SCORE (%)	SATISFACTION SCORE (%)	RECOMMENDED RATIO	NUMBER TESTED	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDED
Mitsubishi	79	71	92	92	43	23	10
Electrolux	78	75	87	86	43	7	3
Fisher & Paykel	78	73	89	87	49	39	19
LG	78	74	89	87	43	40	17
Average*	73	61	88	87			

* Averages are calculated from all brands and models tested.

WASHING MACHINES

Best Brand (front loader): Miele

Best Brand (top loader): LG

Because front loaders and top loaders are such different appliances and perform so differently, we've split them into two categories for Best Brand purposes.

Miele again outperformed all competitors to take the Best Brand title for front loaders, and LG has led the field to qualify as the best top-loader brand.

We award Best Brand based on the average scores and number of recommended models for each brand from the 87 front loaders and 47 top loaders we've tested over the past five years. We then combine these scores with the brand-reliability and owner-satisfaction scores from our 2021 survey of 3575 CHOICE members who own a washing machine.

FRONT LOADER

BRAND	BEST BRAND SCORE (%)	AVERAGE TEST SCORE (%)	RELIABILITY SCORE (%)	SATISFACTION SCORE (%)	RECOMMENDED RATIO	NUMBER TESTED	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDED
Miele	85	81	86	90	88	8	7
Samsung	83	80	87	86	73	15	11
Bosch	82	80	90	91	44	9	4
LG	81	80	88	87	55	11	6
Fisher & Paykel	75	78	82	86	17	12	2
Electrolux	76	78	82	83	33	9	3
Average*	78	79	85	87			

* Averages are calculated from all brands and models tested.

TOP LOADER

BRAND	BEST BRAND SCORE (%)	AVERAGE TEST SCORE (%)	RELIABILITY SCORE (%)	SATISFACTION SCORE (%)	RECOMMENDED RATIO	NUMBER TESTED	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDED
LG	72	70	88	87	0	18	0
Fisher & Paykel	68	65	82	86	0	11	0
Simpson	69	65	89	82	0	6	0
Average*	70	66	86	86			

DISHWASHERS

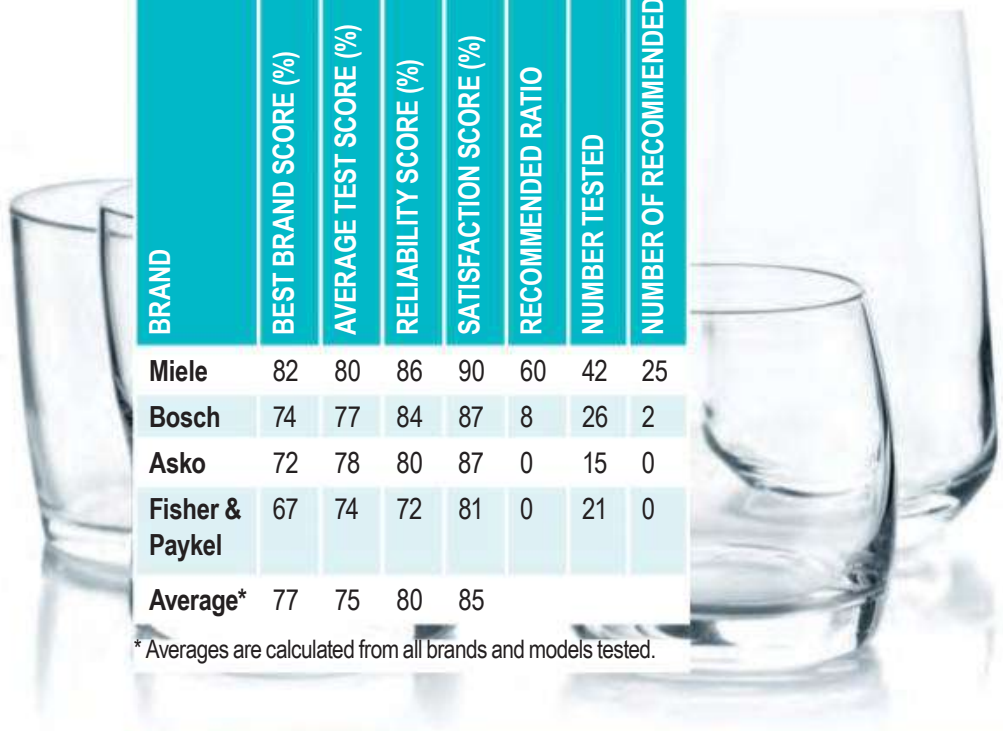
Best Brand: Miele

We calculate Best Brand for dishwashers using the scores of more than 200 dishwashers we've tested for washing and drying performance in our lab over the past five years. We then combine these scores with the reliability and satisfaction scores from our 2021 survey of 2762 CHOICE members who own a dishwasher.

Miele is dishwasher Best Brand for 2021. Other brands weren't eligible because they had fewer than five models in our data, or one or more of their scores were below average.

BRAND	BEST BRAND SCORE (%)	AVERAGE TEST SCORE (%)	RELIABILITY SCORE (%)	SATISFACTION SCORE (%)	RECOMMENDED RATIO	NUMBER TESTED	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDED
Miele	82	80	86	90	60	42	25
Bosch	74	77	84	87	8	26	2
Asko	72	78	80	87	0	15	0
Fisher & Paykel	67	74	72	81	0	21	0
Average*	77	75	80	85			

* Averages are calculated from all brands and models tested.



VACUUM CLEANERS

Best Brand: Miele

CHOICE experts have tested 85 barrel and upright vacuums in our labs over the past four years. They assess dirt pick-up from carpet, as well as how easy the vacuum is to manoeuvre across the floor and empty.

We recommend an impressive seven of the 10 Miele models we assessed. Miele also earns excellent scores for reliability and satisfaction (based on our 2020 survey of 1600 CHOICE members who owned a barrel or upright vac). So it's not surprising that Miele is well ahead of its rivals.

BRAND	BEST BRAND SCORE (%)	AVERAGE TEST SCORE (%)	RELIABILITY SCORE (%)	SATISFACTION SCORE (%)	RECOMMENDED RATIO	NUMBER TESTED	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDED
Miele	84	77	93	90	70	10	7
Dyson	73	72	79	83	38	8	3
Hoover	73	73	81	78	38	8	3
Electrolux	71	75	78	81	20	15	3
Average*	75	72	83	83			

* Averages are calculated from all brands and models tested.

CLOTHES DRYERS

No Best Brand for clothes dryers in 2021

Although several brands, in particular LG and Miele, achieved impressive averages for their CHOICE Expert Ratings, every single brand in our test had one or more scores below average, so none of them are eligible this year.

We assess clothes dryers for Best Brand by analysing the performance of 64 electric-vented, condenser and heat pump dryers that we've tested in our laundry laboratory over the past five years. We measure both the drying time and energy consumption required to dry our 3.5kg test load, and check whether each dryer can meet the six percent (or better) moisture content specified in the Australian standard by the end of the cycle.

Our Best Brand assessment also takes into account a brand's reliability and owner-satisfaction scores, based on feedback from our 2020 survey of 3270 CHOICE members who own clothes dryers. ■

BRAND	BEST BRAND SCORE (%)	AVERAGE TEST SCORE (%)	RELIABILITY SCORE (%)	SATISFACTION SCORE (%)	RECOMMENDED RATIO	NUMBER TESTED	NUMBER OF RECOMMENDED
LG	84	83	88	84	80	10	8
Miele	82	80	84	90	67	6	4
Electrolux	77	72	89	84	44	9	4
Simpson	75	66	96	85	33	6	2
Bosch	72	74	79	86	20	5	1
Fisher & Paykel	72	71	87	84	9	11	1
Average*	77	74	88	85			

* Averages are calculated from all brands and models tested.

IMAGE: GETTY

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USING THE INDEX All articles are from the past 12 months.
* Indicates a correction or clarification (see Checkout).

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Best Brand Oct
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November 20	The Shonkys issue
December 20/January 21	The summer issue
February 21	The health issue
March 21	The insurance issue
April 21	The energy & water issue
May 21	The kitchen issue
June 21	The winter issue
July 21	The travel issue
August 21	The green issue
September 21	The spring at home issue
October 21	The food issue

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NEXT MONTH

The annual loser's list of products and services that left a sour taste in 2021.

CHOICE SHONKYS

Unwanted texts

Why you get them, and how to make them stop

Pet insurers

Time to let them out of the dog house?

Fire pits

The best types for year-round entertaining

Plus Air conditioners, dishwasher detergents, printers & more

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LIGHT ON THE FRUIT

When your fruit loaf dreams get crushed by reality.

LOCKDOWN DELIRIUM

"I thought this was a designer toilet roll,' says Danny Coates in NSW. "Lockdown must be getting to me!"

HARD WORD

Our long-serving rogues' gallery of dodgy ads, toe-curling typos and misadventures in marketing, as sent in by you – our tickled, angered and bewildered readers. And thanks to the timeless shonkiness of so much advertising, you're always spoilt for choice – so keep 'em coming. Email high-quality unedited photos to hardword@choice.com.au.

This month, thanks go to Jenni Cascun (What travel restrictions?), Danny Coates (Lockdown delirium), Doug Copp (Pig difference) and Angela Roennfeldt (Light on the fruit).

Compiled by Daniel Davies

WHAT TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS?

Norway, Ireland, Germany, Australia... not even COVID-19 can block this cheese's travels.

PIG DIFFERENCE

No wonder so many shoppers have a beef with meat labels.